

choice

THE PEOPLE'S WATCHDOG

BWARE WHAT YOU WEAR
Are your clothes toxic?

GO FAST FOOD
Not so vegetarian,
Not so healthy...

277
products
reviewed!

**PARALLEL
UNIVERSES**
Why buy local
when imports
are so cheap?

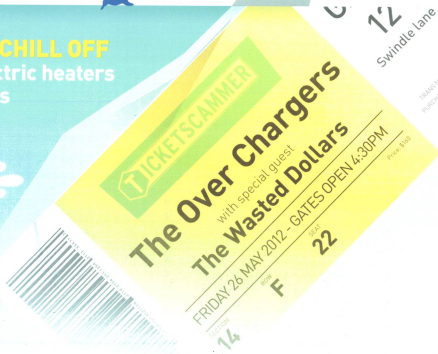
TAKE THE CHILL OFF
Test electric heaters
and blankets

TESTS

Vacuum cleaners
Laundry detergents
Washers & mixers
Clothes dryers
Car tyres
Wireless speakers
AV receivers
Camcorders
Strollers

Hidden depths

The murky world of ticket agencies



Global exchange

We're making sure Aussie consumers are heard internationally – and learning how other consumer groups confront today's challenges

I've just returned from India and the UK representing CHOICE at Consumers' International and ensuring that the voice of Australian consumers is heard at international institutions such as World Bank discussions on financial reform. But I have to say, one thing you notice about working internationally is the treacle-paced response to change in a world where markets can turn overnight.

Consumers' International has members from 110 countries, and it's inspiring to see how consumer groups across the world are meeting the challenges of today. For example, the Dutch organisation Consumentenbond has just conducted a reverse auction for energy switching, where 32,000 people came forward to negotiate a one-year fixed fee discount of €287 on their energy bills.

Mumbai Grahak Panchayat, one of the Indian consumer groups, has just won its campaign to get electronic taxi meters that cannot be tampered

with fitted into all three-wheeler autos in Mumbai.

And the consumer group in Afghanistan has marked World Consumer Rights Day (15 March) for the first time ever with a debate on excessive money transfer fees, poor financial services, and the lack of awareness among Afghans about their legal financial rights.

It's inspiring stuff that makes us here at CHOICE even more determined to achieve more for our members and Australian consumers with our campaigns for better banking, fairer energy markets and effective food labelling, among many other issues.

One area of growing interest to Aussie consumers is the increasing benefits and challenges of globalisation in retail. This month we look at parallel imports, where the

same branded products – whether Mars or Canon – are up to 40% cheaper when they're imported into Australia from Asia or the US. We also touch on the recent parliamentary inquiry into price discrimination by tech companies such as Apple.

Also this month, we take a practical look at fast food for vegetarians. You'd think being a vegetarian is a pretty healthy way of life, but when it comes to fast food, it seems this couldn't be further from the truth. We found vegetarian fast foods often have extremely high kilojoules, salt and fat, all of which add up to a pretty unhealthy experience. But so as not to leave you feeling thoroughly defeated, we have found one or two healthy alternatives.

As always, please feel free to contact me about any issue by telephone or email (my contact details are below). I speak to members every week and it's a great way for me to stay in touch with what matters to you. In return, I believe CHOICE is continuing to improve the service we provide you.

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When it comes to strong consumer advocacy, everything's apples

CHOICE. The People's Watchdog

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the very best goods and services, and avoid the worst. We pay full price for all the products we test, so we remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising and we don't accept freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by subscriptions to our magazines, choice.com.au and from other services we supply to benefit members and consumers. CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

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Heat up your nights...

72 Electric heaters

... and your mornings and evenings too



We take a trip to a parallel world. See page 20 for our story on grey market imports

CHOICE's Elise Dalley plays spot the difference

Free and happy

Calls for meaningful free range labels are being heard, if recent developments in two states are anything to go by.

In SA, legislation has been introduced by the Greens and Liberal opposition that, if passed, will define "free range" as a maximum of 1500 birds per hectare in the outdoor range. This reflects the current voluntary industry code, but big egg producers under the Egg Corporation want that number to be increased to 20,000.

Meanwhile, the NSW government has hosted meetings with egg industry members to develop labelling standards. CHOICE's request to attend was declined by the Minister for Primary Industries.

Queensland remains the only state to have legislated the 1500 bird limit.

ANGELA McDUGALL

The good oil

The Heart Foundation has introduced a licensing program for fish oil products that meet its criteria for quality, omega-3 content and sourcing. Licensees can display the logo on products, so consumers can have confidence that the products are safe and meet claims on the label.

The Heart Foundation recommends Australian adults consume at least 500mg of omega-3 EPA/DHA every day to reduce their risk of heart disease. You can get your recommended amount of omega-3 by eating two or three 150g serves of oily fish (such as salmon or sardines) every week or by supplementing your intake with fish oil supplements and omega-3 enriched foods and drinks, such as eggs, milk and bread.

The Heart Foundation recommends adults consume 500mg of omega-3 each day

The foundation also recommends 1000mg for people with heart disease, although recent research involving more than 20,000 such people found supplements don't help prevent heart attack or stroke. For these people, eating fish may be the better choice, as it can replace less healthy foods such as red meat.

KARINA BRAY

BREAKING NEWS

False facts on vax

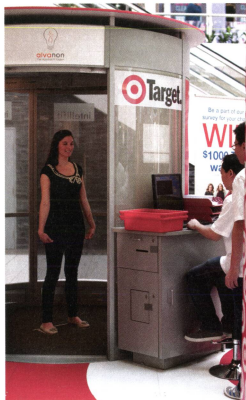
The ACCC has ordered Homeopathy Plus! to remove a page that recommends parents use homeopathic prophylaxis against whooping cough from its website. ACCC chairman Rod Sims said, "The combination of claims that the vaccine was ineffective and that the homeopathic remedies listed on the page were an alternative prevention and treatment regime elevated this matter to one of extreme concern".

Cheap shot

Savvy Australian shoppers seeking overseas bargains online may find themselves foiled soon, with a number of local importers striking agreements with international brands to stop selling their clothes to Australians on overseas websites. Others are negotiating set prices or limits on supply. For more on parallel imports, turn to page 20.

Smaller savers

Following the 0.5% RBA interest rate cut in May, banks didn't forget about little savers. Bankwest slashed 2% from their Kid's Bonus Saver, while ANZ, CBA, NAB and Suncorp cut 0.5% from their accounts. Westpac sliced off 0.3% and now pays the highest standard rate. For more see May's CHOICE or go to choice.com.au/youngsavers.



\$1m

The amount invested by Target to measure body shape of its customers

20,000

The number of adults the retailer will measure Australia-wide

15sec

The amount of time it takes the Alvascan to measure a fully clothed person

Target shapes up

Target Australia has invested in a \$1m project to digitally size up Australian consumers with an imported body scanner used by overseas retailers such as Marks & Spencer in the UK. They plan to take the device around Australia to collect body shape data on 20,000 adults.

Target hopes the initiative will help it improve fit as well as generate more online sales and cut its 30% return rate.

The Alvascan, made by Alvanon, can give accurate measurements within a centimetre and takes less than 15 seconds to size up a fully

clothed person. Jonathan Wang, Alvanon's vice president of research and development, who has worked on body data collection projects with retailers and governments worldwide, says he's surprised Australia hasn't had any significant body shape data for more than 50 years.

CHOICE has covered the disparity in clothing sizes before and supports the idea of a national sizing survey. While this initiative is a small step for Australian shoppers, the move will see Target customers enjoy better-fitting and better-sized clothes as early as next year.

KATE BROWNE

Pricey gifts

Grandparents need to beware of gifting rules when they help pay for their grandkids' education. Pensioners can only gift up to \$10,000 per financial year, and up to \$30,000 over a five-year period. Any amounts above this may reduce your pension.

So if, for example, your assets already exceed the cap for a full pension, an extra \$1000 will reduce your part pension by \$1.50. If your income already exceeds the cap for a full pension, every extra dollar will reduce your part pension by 50c.

For our report on saving for education, see page 34.

UTA MIHM



\$30,000

The maximum amount you can gift to a grandchild without reducing your pension in a five-year period

Bee good The CSIRO has partnered with Lonza, a life sciences firm, in efforts to use bees' silk in the production of sponges, knitted and woven fabrics. The partnership comes after research conducted by the CSIRO in recent years showed insect silk is lightweight and tough enough for high-strength usage. It could also be used for medical purposes such as wound repair and replacing human tissue.

PABLO VINALES

Why we care about (some) cars



We've been taking First Looks [see right] at a raft of new cars that claim to use less fuel by employing different types of technologies [see choice.com.au/hybrid]. We're keen to check out their fuel-saving claims and see how and where the technology has changed in the past several years, and whether it impacts on your everyday driving experience. Where possible we use cars owned by our staff, otherwise we borrow them directly from the manufacturer. By reviewing cars on a case-by-case basis we can pinpoint any downsides of these new engines and features that may become more common.

MATTHEW STEEN

Does your loyalty fly?

Coles will send more than 16 million new Flybuys cards to over eight million households in one of the country's biggest ever mail-outs. The mail-out is spearheading a revamped program.

"If you're a regular shopper this program can work in your favour,

but it's basically there to provide a disincentive to shop around," says CHOICE head of media Ingrid Just. We've also previously highlighted how retailers use loyalty programs to collect enormous amounts of personal information [see choice.com.au/loyaltyprograms].

SAM BUTLER

Free call reform

ACMA has said it will use its regulatory powers to make telco providers stop charging different prices for 1800 or 13 calls from landlines and mobiles – eventually. Following an 18-month Fair Call for All marketing campaign led by ACCAN, "free" calls from mobiles will actually have to be free, or priced as a local call, as is the case with landlines. ACCAN has been pushing for the change on the basis that 1800/13 calls are often for essential services and currently cost as much as \$1.78 per minute from mobiles. The rub is that ACMA has set a distant January 2015 deadline to make the change official.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

Rolls recall

Rolls-Royces reportedly worth more than \$100m sold between 2003 and 2011 are being recalled nationwide due to safety problems.

Product Safety Australia identified the Rolls-Royce Phantom series as having a danger of engine oil entering the brake booster, resulting in reduced power braking assistance. The Rolls-Royce Ghost cars have also been recalled due to a possible fire hazard.

BMW Australia has also recalled its BMW S 1000 RR motorcycle due to escaping oil or the possibility of a sudden engine seizure, which would cause a serious motor accident.

AFRAH FAZLI

Lizzies love us

CHOICE Computer has cemented its reputation for excellent home technology advice and reviews with its performance at the IT Journalism Awards – the "Lizzies". At the April awards, CC was highly commended as Best Technology Magazine, and technology team leader Steve Duncombe was a finalist as Best Consumer Technology Journalist. CHOICE also had a strong debut as a finalist for Best Personal Technology Coverage. To upgrade your subscription to include three-time Best Technology Magazine-winner CC, call our Customer Service team on 1800 069 552 or visit choice.com.au.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH



It's easy being green

We took the Mazda 3 SP20 Skyactiv for a spin to find out how it performs – and what makes it green.

Mazda claims the 3 SP20 Skyactiv has a more efficient engine than comparable models. There are also some weight and friction changes to both the engine and body. The six-speed automatic gearbox uses a lock-up system that Mazda claims makes gear changes smoother in auto mode and saves fuel.

The leather seats are firm with plenty of lateral support, the dashboard has soft plastics, and instruments and controls are laid out well. It looks modern, but some may find the instrument lights a bit bright. A fair bit of road noise enters the cabin.

Mazda claims an average fuel consumption figure of 6.2L/100km for this hatch. We measured it at around 7.2L/100km on a mixture of city and motorway driving, including our



The ride is a little harsh on rutted or corrugated surfaces. However, the car feels responsive and agile when accelerating and is quick to stop, but there is a slight delay in the gear change before it switches up to 4th, 5th or 6th after acceleration. Selecting gears manually would override this.

The i-stop system shuts down the engine under certain conditions (for example, if the car is fully stopped, the brake pedal is pressed firmly, it's not on a hill and the steering is not turned past a certain point) and restarts as soon as the brake is released. It should save fuel in city driving, but is probably best turned off if you're in a line of crawling traffic (it will turn the engine on and off every few seconds).

braking and acceleration tests, although the dash-mounted display gave an average of 6.5L/100km.

CHOICE verdict

Though not quite as fuel-efficient as a diesel or hybrid, this is a responsive, comfortable car. We recommend it if you're looking to reduce your fuel bill without compromising on comfort, but there are better options if all you're interested in is saving fuel. **CHRIS RUGGLES**

MAZDA 3 SP20 SKYACTIV

PRICE \$31,674

CONTACT mazda.com.au



Staking claims

The TGA has drafted proposed guidelines that aim to clarify the type of evidence makers of complementary medicine must have to support claims for their products. The guidelines will mean companies are less able to make claims they can't support about their products' potential health benefits.

One key recommendation is to distinguish clearly between claims based on traditional use and those grounded in scientific evidence. The evidence must meet prescribed quality standards and be compiled and evaluated by a suitably qualified expert. Weight loss products are also being more closely scrutinised, with outcomes such as "increased metabolic rate" not considered synonymous with evidence supporting claims of weight loss.

Members of the complementary medicines industry are concerned the guidelines will force products off the market because they won't be able to comply with the requirements for evidence.

KARINA BRAY

Get social...

Join us on Facebook and Twitter for a glimpse behind the scenes of CHOICE and to share your views.





Sunny conditions?

You've heard of solar electricity and solar hot water, but what about solar air conditioning?

Ice Solair air conditioners are split-system reverse-cycle models with an added thermal panel mounted alongside the outdoor unit. The thermal panel cycles refrigerant from the outdoor unit through coils and absorbs energy from the sun and air to warm it, thus reducing the need for the compressor to run. This saves up to 50% of electricity compared to similar capacity systems, it's claimed.

Sounds good in theory, but it's not so good in practice. We tested the Ice Solair 3.5kW wall-mounted split system and found it a mediocre performer in almost every way. It's rated at three stars for cooling and heating, but under our test conditions (which are tougher than the official rating scheme) it would rate only one or one-and-a-half stars.

Not only is it inefficient at cooling and heating compared with most standard inverter models we've tested, but it has a quite limited range of airflow. It's also only OK for

ease of use, due to a remote control with a small, hard-to-read display and labels, basic instructions and purifying filters that are fiddly to remove and replace. Its indoor and outdoor units are also noisier than most other tested models. It has many of the usual features of a split-system air conditioner, such as a fan-only mode, three air speeds, sleep mode and automatic de-icing.

Our lab had an Ice Solair-trained tradesperson check our installation was OK. Nevertheless, the distributor disputes our results.

CHOICE verdict

If you're looking for an efficient air conditioner, a well-designed inverter model is a better bet than the Ice Solair. See our recent test in *CHOICE*, May 2012, for some examples.

CHRIS BARNES

ICE SOLAIR ICE(RC)-35WM

PRICE \$2076

CONTACT icesolair.com



FIRST
LOOK

Ask away

Negotiate with your bank for a better interest rate on your term deposit, says the RBA. When you see the term deposit rate advertised in your local bank, "you should be able to go in and extract an extra 10 basis points [one tenth of a percentage point]" from the bank, advises RBA assistant governor Guy Debelle.

Term deposits may pay higher interest rates than other forms of deposits such as savings accounts and make up about 44% of the major banks' deposits.

AFRAH FAZLI

44%

The percentage of the banks' major deposits made up of term deposits

Limiting limits

Notifications about credit card limit increases sent to Westpac customers have been withdrawn after ASIC found the content of the messages misleading.

New laws commencing on 1 July will prohibit banks from sending unsolicited credit limit increase invitations to customers without their consent. Messages sent by Westpac between February and March notified customers of changes to the law and requested customer consent to future credit limit invitations. ASIC found the messages inferred customers would miss out on accessing additional funds in the future if they didn't consent urgently.

The move comes after ASIC accepted a court enforceable undertaking from the CBA, who sent out similar emails via their internet banking platform in December last year.

ELISE DALLEY



Food for thought

Good news for berry lovers: cognitive ageing could be delayed by up to two-and-a-half years in elderly people who eat larger amounts of flavonoid-rich blueberries and strawberries, according to a study published in the *Annals of Neurology*.

But there's not-so-good news for those who prefer their food to be salty:

Canadian researchers examined the diet and lifestyle of 1262 adults and found that less-active people showed better cognitive function over time if they had a low sodium intake.

So the take-home message is, keep active, keep your salt intake down and bring on the berries!

RACHEL CLEMONS

CHOICE makes a splash

In the coming months you'll see the CHOICE logo appearing on products in store or in advertising, including in ads for laundry brand Omo. Our CHOICE Recommended scheme allows manufacturers to use our logo under licence and subject to strict regulations as to whether their product meets our testing standards for performance and excellence. This helps consumers choose the best models on the market and recognises manufacturers with excellent products.

Manufacturers can't pay to have a product tested or recommended by CHOICE – we buy products anonymously, test them and make independent recommendations – but they can choose to promote CHOICE's recognition through this scheme. We use the licence fees to help expand our test program so that consumers can make good buying decisions on even more products.

LINDA MAGEE

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choice
RECOMMENDED
June 2012

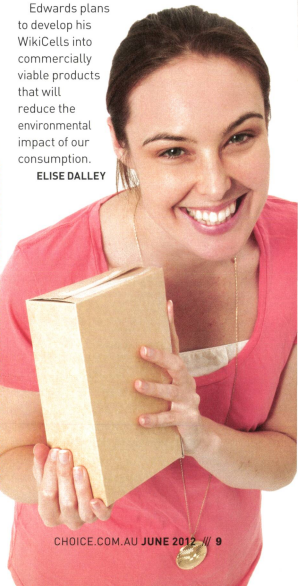
Tasty package

A new edible packaging technology that could not only transform the way we eat and drink, but also drastically reduce the amount of plastic waste that finds its way into landfill, is being trialled by David Edwards and his team at Harvard's Wyss Institute for Biologically Inspired Engineering.

WikiCells hold food and liquid much the same as packaging membranes found in nature, for example fruit skins. To date, the team have experimented with tomato membranes filled with gazpacho soup, an orange membrane filled with juice and a small sips of wine encased in a grape-like membrane.

Edwards plans to develop his WikiCells into commercially viable products that will reduce the environmental impact of our consumption.

ELISE DALLEY



choice MEMBERS NOTICEBOARD

Member spotlight

Introducing CHOICE member, Glyn Davies, a retired lecturer from Griffith University who now resides in the delightful Atherton Tableland town of Yungaburra. Glyn has been married for 48 years and has three children and three grandchildren.



Why did you join CHOICE?

Back in the 1960s, every penny we spent had to count. Quality was (and still is) the watchword, and CHOICE was the most informative consumer magazine available – in fact, it seemed to be the only one in those days. So, we established a long-term relationship with the Australian Consumers' Association that endures to this day.

What part of CHOICE magazine do you read first? And why?

I have yet to join CHOICE Online, but am getting very close to doing so, as I realise just how timely and convenient it is to have information available on the internet. As for the magazine, I devour it from cover to cover. Of course, the product reviews interest me – especially if I or a friend is in the market for a new appliance – but I am equally interested in the general consumer information published in the front of the magazine.

What campaigns are the most important to you?

I would choose the grocery campaign to curb the power of the major supermarkets (an ongoing campaign) and to introduce better food labelling and country of origin laws.

What products would you like to see CHOICE put to the test?

As tablet computers such as the iPad are becoming part of everyday life for my children and grandchildren, I would very much like to read a comprehensive report on those machines, so that when I do actually join the revolution, I won't do so with a popgun instead of a rifle.

Tell us about your CHOICE experience – become our next Member in the Spotlight! Send us an email at inthespotlight@choice.com.au.

So many benefits!

choice

PLUS



As a CHOICE member you already have access to expert, independent advice on hundreds of product reports and tests, but CHOICE Plus can offer you more! By upgrading your current magazine membership to CHOICE Plus you'll receive:

- 11 issues of CHOICE magazine each year
- Access to even more product reports and tests online, with new ones added weekly, saving you time and money
- Full access to CHOICE Mobile for product information when you need it most, at the point of sale
- Eligibility to be a Voting Member
- CHOICE's Price & Buy service, with immediate online pricing comparisons
- Monthly newsletters announcing newly released tests and reports
- Invitations to have your say in CHOICE surveys on readership and product reliability
- Create an online voice, leave feedback and rate stories
- The opportunity to be directly involved in consumer action campaigns that matter to you

To upgrade call our Customer Service team on 1800 069 552 or (02) 9577 3399.

Lab Tours

Are you curious about how CHOICE tests hundreds of products every year? Come to one of our lab tours in Marrickville, Sydney. Upcoming tours will be held on Thursday 14 June and Friday 13 July. Numbers are limited, so go to choice.com.au/about-us/lab-tours or email us at labtours@choice.com.au to book.





Future farming

A global comparison of organic and conventional farming systems has shown that while organic yields are typically lower than conventional yields, the difference varies considerably according to management practices, crop types and growing conditions. It found yields range from just three per cent up to 34% lower from organic farming than from comparable conventional farming practices.

The meta-analysis reviewed 66 studies comparing the yields of 34 different crop species in organic and conventional farming systems.

Organic agriculture performs particularly poorly for vegetables and some cereal crops such as wheat, according to the study. Organic approaches fare better when producing fruits such as strawberries and oilseed crops such as soybean.

The study concludes that to establish organic agriculture as an important tool in sustainable food production, the factors limiting organic yields need to be more fully understood, alongside assessments of the social, environmental and economic benefits of organic farming systems.

RACHEL CLEMONS



Dirty clouds

A recent report from Greenpeace has slammed major companies for the ways in which they fuel cloud computing. Apple, Amazon, IBM and Microsoft have all been criticised for their use of a dirty energy and lack of innovation in powering their clouds, which allow access to files online and use large amounts of power.

The best performers in Greenpeace's Clean Energy Index were Dell, Yahoo and Google. Yahoo and Google also lead the way in renewable energy investment and sustainable practices.

Apple, the highest user of coal power of the 14 companies in the research, has since disputed the findings of the report.

Electricity demand from data centres is expected to grow by 19% in 2012, and to triple by 2020. Big data centres use the same amount of energy required to power 180,000 home and can be seen from space.

JACKSON DEVEREUX

Back to \$chool



\$11,000

Estimated cost of secondary year at a metropolitan independent (e.g. Catholic) school

\$4000

Estimated cost of secondary year at metropolitan government school

\$20,000

Estimated cost of secondary year at a metropolitan private school. Turn to page 34 for more

Rough take-off

A new National Airline Customer Advocate Scheme, which will offer airline passengers independent help and protection in complaint resolution, will begin from 1 July.

The advocate, jointly funded by Australia's top five domestic airlines, will work with a committee comprised of a representative from each of the airlines to resolve complaints within 20 working days. Its main role will be to

work as facilitator of customer issues in cases when problems cannot be directly

resolved with airlines. It will also monitor and report on the number of complaints received and the major reasons for complaints to each participating airline.

But there's much room for improvement, as the advocate will not be able to make binding decisions and its oversight committee will be run by the airlines.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

Sneaky Coles

SA's independent Senator Nick Xenophon (below) is pushing for major fuel retailers to post prices on publicly available websites. Xenophon made the call after Colesexpress stopped telling peak motoring bodies what it was charging, a unilateral action the senator called a "sneaky move". He is also questioning whether Coles is hiking fuel and grocery prices to compensate for use of its discount shopper vouchers, and wants the ACCC to look into it. **ANDY KOLLMORGEN**



Put this baby in the corner

The Beaba Babycook claims to make preparing healthy meals for your baby easy and can steam, blend, reheat and defrost all in the one compact unit. Portions vary depending on age (initially about two tablespoons) so leftovers can be portioned and frozen. We found its maximum bowl capacity to be only 500mL. It claims to take only 10-15 minutes to prepare a cooked meal.

Our home economist, Fiona Mair, tested the Babycook by steaming vegetables, cooking chicken, and making a potato and spinach puree and pear compote. While the appliance cooked all foods excellently, you can achieve the same result by steaming on your cooktop or using a microwave. All dishes took more than 10 minutes to make in the Babycook, the longest taking just over 17 minutes. While it would take the same amount of time on your cooktop, using your microwave will take no longer than five minutes.

Fiona found the dial control to be small and stiff to operate and the steaming indicator light very faint. Locking the bowl into the unit is

difficult – the instructions state that this is the case when the appliance is new. Unlocking the lid is also difficult as there is little grip. Cleaning the bowl, blade and steamer basket is easy, but the exterior can stain and has cracks where food can become trapped. The water reservoir also needs to be descaled frequently.

CHOICE verdict

Making baby food isn't complicated – you can use the same ingredients as for your own meal, but don't season your baby's portion. You can also steam or microwave meats, fruits and vegetables quickly, and a cheap stick blender (see page 42) will do the job of pureeing – and can be used for more than just baby food.

REBECCA GATTO

BEABA BABYCOOK ORIGINAL

PRICE \$240

CONTACT kitchenwaredirect.com.au



► I SAY

Terms of enagement

The Australian Consumer Law has a nice little clause about unfair contract terms. The gist of it is that a term needs to be necessary and can't be weighed too heavily in favour of one side or cause consumer detriment. If it's deemed unfair – even if a contract has been signed and sealed – the unfair term can be removed.

United Airlines apparently isn't up to speed on the new ACL regime in Australia, or maybe they're not too concerned at corporate HQ about getting ensnared in its web. I say this because I recently entered a contract with United to fly to the US. The terms of the contract

were very clear on my end – I could get the comparatively cheap seats as long as I didn't make any changes to the tickets. Altering

the terms of the contract in such a way would be punished by a significant price hike, thereby undercutting our budget-conscious travel strategy (especially necessary because our two early teens are now officially "adults" in the eyes of the airline).

No worries there: to hedge against unforeseen developments I could always grab some travel insurance or check to see if the insurance offered by my credit card was enough. What I haven't been able to control is what the airline got up to. United has changed our departure and arrival times on the two US legs of our journey no fewer than five times (so far!). The net effect is a much earlier arrival at one airport than originally agreed on (and paid for) and an inconveniently later departure time at a different airport, meaning we'll have to figure out what to do with ourselves between the checkout deadline at the hotel and our flight – all in a big city with which we're unfamiliar.

My gravest concern is that United will hit us with new flight changes while we're airborne or on the ride to the airport. Apparently, there's nothing in the law to prevent them or other airlines from doing this.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

My gravest concern is that United will hit us with new flight changes while we're airborne or on the ride to the airport

The right price

On 1 July 2012 the carbon price, which will see about 500 of Australia's biggest carbon emitters pay \$23 for every tonne of carbon they release, will come into effect.

Research conducted by CSIRO and AECOM found the carbon price will add 0.6% to inflation in 2012-13 (an extra six cents for every \$10 spent) and a second impact of up to 0.1% in 2015-16, assuming businesses pass on the full cost to consumers. The research shows an average Australian household will see its living expenses increase by \$9.10 per week on average.

An assistance package is also being introduced to help households adjust to the introduction of the carbon price. Nine out of 10 Australian households are expected to receive financial assistance that will be delivered through a mix of tax cuts, higher Family Tax Benefits, increases in pensions and allowances.

The arrival of the carbon price may also be accompanied by scam artists, so beware. If you're eligible for household assistance, you do not need to apply for it to receive it. If you receive a phone call asking for your bank account or personal details, or claiming you need to pay money to receive a compensation payment, hang up immediately. **KATRINA LEE**

For more information on how a price on carbon will affect your cost of living, go to yourcarbonprice.com.au. For further information on whether you will receive assistance, and how much if so, visit cleanenergyfuture.gov.au.

Your Say

We want to hear from you. If your experience is not good, then you can help other CHOICE members avoid scams and rip-offs. If you've had a great response to a complaint you've taken to a manufacturer or retailer, our members want to know about that too! Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Contact us!

Email us at
yoursay@choice.com.au
or write to Your Say,
CHOICE,
57 Carrington Road,
Marrickville, NSW 2204.



The federal government is currently looking at this industry by way of the Commonwealth Consumer Affairs Advisory Council (CCAAC), which released an issues paper late last year. CCAAC is an expert advisory panel that provides advice to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer on consumer policy issues. Former CHOICE CEO, Peter Kell, and former CHOICE policy manager, Gordon Renouf, are both members of CCAAC.

Moot points

After many years of accumulating points with my Westpac card I had enough to purchase \$600 worth of gift vouchers from David Jones. I was intending to use the vouchers for an iPad, but sadly I lost them – I suspect they ended up at the rubbish tip.

I contacted Westpac to request they cancel the vouchers, but to no avail – they claim they don't keep a record of the vouchers. David Jones were no more helpful.

I find it hard to accept that a bank and a major retailer don't keep a record of such transactions. Surely when audits occur there should be an explanation as to the extra \$600 on their ledger.

Silvio Iadarola, Adelaide, SA

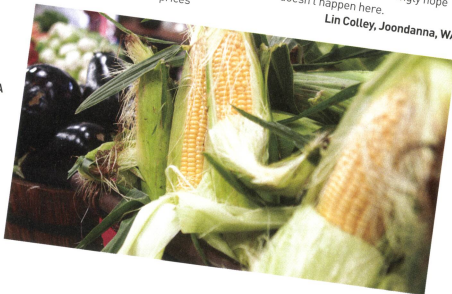
CHOICE SAYS Consumers continue to contact us with stories of cashed-up plastic that ends up worthless. In most cases, the unspent money goes back to the retailer. CHOICE supports the move to clamp down on abuses relating to expiry and conditions of use in the \$1.5bn gift card industry.

Local support

Iwould like to comment on the letter from Charlotte Kershaw with regard to disappearing product lines from Coles and Woolworths (see CHOICE, May 2012). Charlotte, can I suggest you do as I do and shop at your local independent supermarket. I do my grocery shopping at my local IGA store where I can buy all my favourite brands, and at prices

competitive with the big two. Also, by purchasing from your local independent, you support your local community. I can also get fuel coupons from IGA when I spend \$30 or more, which is competitive with similar offers from Coles and Woolies. I also shop at my local butcher, fishmonger and fruit and veg outlets as I believe in supporting local producers and purchasing the freshest ingredients. If you don't support them, they'll disappear as they have in many parts of the UK, where the major supermarkets dominate. In some towns and villages, they have no choice but to purchase all their food and groceries at a large supermarket as all the smaller shops have long gone. I strongly hope this doesn't happen here.

Lin Colley, Joondanna, WA





"After paying a 10% deposit we found out the kitchen door foil finish may lift when exposed to heat and moisture"

Foiled by shaky guarantee

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We've had an unfortunate experience with a well-known kitchen designer/manufacturer. After signing the contract and paying a 10% deposit, we found out the kitchen door foil finish may lift when exposed to heat and moisture. Prior to signing, the designer had told us the kitchen had a seven-year guarantee, so we were sure this would cover the issue.

After a few requests we received a copy of the guarantee, which stated that it does not cover kitchens for "exposure to heat or water reasonable wear and tear [sic]". Assuming this meant we weren't covered if the finish lifted due to heat or water of any kind, we requested

the order be cancelled. We were advised our deposit would not be refunded as we'd broken the contract. We wouldn't have signed this contract if we'd known the terms of the guarantee. We were also told a copy of the guarantee isn't usually provided until the kitchen has been installed! The company hasn't replied to our request for a refund.

Since then we received our credit card bill that shows they deducted a further \$2400 without asking us, on the same day they took our deposit. We are disputing this with the credit card company.

Colin Williamson, Leichhardt, NSW

CHOICE SAYS The new nationwide Australian Consumer Law protects

consumers by requiring goods sold to be of acceptable quality, which includes being fit for purpose and durable.

Colin's first step is to contact NSW Fair Trading and present them with a synopsis of events, timeline and the documentation. He could reasonably expect that, were he to have the kitchen installed, the foil finish in it would not lift under normal circumstances (which, being a kitchen, involves some exposure to heat and water). This is despite the company's guarantee, which appears to state that it would not cover any damage whatsoever caused by any heat and water.

Since first writing to CHOICE, Colin tells us that he successfully disputed the second charge with his credit card company and recovered the money.

Thumbs



Congratulations to Snowgum Moorabbin for excellent customer service. I took a well-used two-year-old Snowgum backpack in to ask if a small side zip that had broken could be repaired. They told me it would be very difficult, and therefore expensive, to insert a new zip in this position – and instead presented me with a free replacement backpack.

Juliet Francis Bird, Black Rock, Vic



I recently used pricing website Lasoo to get the best price for a DVD box set. When I reached the retailer the price was much higher. I showed the retailer the website on my phone with the retailers' own logo, but they insisted it was a mistake and wouldn't give me the DVDs at the price as advertised on Lasoo. I returned home and complained via email to Lasoo. They promptly offered to investigate the matter and

in the meantime offered to send me the DVD box set for free.

Sharon Harwood, Rossmoyne, WA



My parents' three-year-old Uniden UHF radios developed a fault with one of the handsets. We dropped off the radios to Uniden, who fixed the fault within a week and posted the radios back to my parents.

Diana Laverty, Lindfield, NSW

Tick(et)ed off

No matter the event, you'll likely be slugged a whole lot of extra charges for tickets, says **Zoya Sheftalovich**

So you want to see Prince live on stage. You think you're onto a sure thing – you get online early, head straight to the ticket vendor's website, and when the tickets finally become available, you rush all the way through the booking process. But when you click "confirm", the site goes down, you lose your seats, and by the time you get through it all again, the tickets are sold out. Of course, you could always go on eBay and buy those tickets you missed out on – if you're willing to pay a Princely sum.

Most Australians are likely to attend a sporting or cultural event at least once this year. And whether it's a concert, sporting event or the theatre, chances are you're going to have to buy a ticket – and that's where the trouble starts.

The big two

While the Australian ticketing industry is made up of a number of companies, two major players selling sports, concert and theatre tickets are Ticketek and Ticketmaster.



According to Ticketek, it processes 18 million tickets to more than 13,000 events every year, and services 225 venues and clients. These include Sydney's ANZ Stadium and Allphones Arena, the SCG and MCG, Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane, Canberra Stadium and the Adelaide Entertainment Centre.

Ticketmaster claims to ticket more than 10,000 events every year. Venues it has the exclusive rights to process ticketing to include Melbourne's Etihad Stadium, the Sydney Entertainment Centre, Brisbane Cricket Ground and WA's Patersons Stadium.

When CHOICE looked into ticketing back in 2009, we found these exclusivity agreements with venues were constricting competition (see *CHOICE*

The Federal Court found Ticketek engaged in anti-competitive conduct on four separate occasions

April 2009 or head to choice.com.au/ticketing2009).

At that time, we wrote: "To get exclusive ticketing rights, these companies have to pay the venue owners 'key money', which they recoup through high ticket profit margins. The result is a duopoly that does little for competitive pricing... Event owners and producers may have a choice of venue, but they have no choice of ticket seller when the exclusive ticketing rights of the venue have been signed over to a particular ticketing agency."

Alarm bells over ticketing have continued to sound ever since.

In 2010, the ACCC took action against Ticketek, having investigated its treatment of discount-ticketing retailer Lasttix. In December last year, the Federal Court imposed a penalty totalling \$2.5m on Ticketek, finding that on four



separate occasions Ticketek engaged in conduct with the anti-competitive purpose of deterring or preventing Lasttix from supplying its services.

"Ticketek's market strength allowed it to do things it may not have done in a more competitive environment," ACCC chairman Rod Sims said at the time. "Their behaviour towards Lasttix was opportunistic, anti-competitive and found by the court to be unacceptable."

Charging for the post

Ticketing agencies make money by levying "inside" and/or "outside" charges. The outside charge is what the end customer pays, often called booking or transaction fees. The inside charge is paid by the promoter or person who puts on an event. According to industry insiders CHOICE spoke to on the condition of



\$7.60

Charge for a ticket sold through and emailed by Ticketek that customers had to print themselves

anonymity, Ticketek and Ticketmaster both levy an inside charge – in some cases operating on a sliding scale – that can be up to about 10% of the cost of the ticket. We have not been able to confirm this charge with Ticketek, while Chris Forbes, CEO of Ticketmaster, did not confirm or deny these charges, saying “I cannot breach commercial in confidence and disclose ticketing arrangements between ourselves and our clients”.

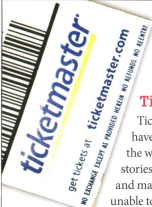
Outside charges can also be high. Despite the fact it costs just \$3.65 to send a single letter by registered post, Ticketek customers buying tickets to Ghostface Killah and DOOM at Sydney’s Enmore Theatre this year will cough up \$11.25 for the same service. And fans who bought tickets through Ticketek for Jack White’s Sydney show had to pay a \$7.60 charge for a ticket they were sent as an email attachment and had to print themselves. To top it off, they had to pay a credit card surcharge as well.

Those buying tickets from Ticketmaster to The Nutcracker on Ice in Melbourne this year are in the same boat – a \$7.15 handling charge is levied even at those who elect to print their own tickets, and is revealed only at the very end of the booking process.

Sanna Cormick is an avid concert and music festival attendee. She goes to multiple events each year, and is concerned about the avalanche of charges she pays.

“The excess fees for postage, credit card fees and transaction fees are ridiculous and ticket prices here are extremely expensive compared with the rest of the world,” she says. “I remember lining up at the box office at 9am to get tickets. But now we do it online. I don’t think the transaction fee is fair when we do all the work. The ticket companies already get a percentage of the ticket sales.” ▶





Ticket tech woes

Ticketek and Ticketmaster have been in the press for all the wrong reasons lately, with stories of programming errors and malfunctioning websites unable to cope with high consumer demand circulating.

Specifically, Ticketek has been slammed for its handling of sales for the One Direction and Prince concerts, while Ticketmaster was criticised after its pre-sale of Radiohead tickets didn't go according to plan. Ticketmaster's Chris Forbes says the Radiohead pre-sale problems were due to a programming error. "The website did not crash," he says. "The issue was quickly resolved." Our industry insiders tell us that antiquated software may be to blame.

Bartek Marnane is technology director at News Ticketing, which operates ticketing vendors Moshtix and Foxtix. While unwilling to comment directly on Ticketek and Ticketmaster, he agrees the issue may at least in part be technical.

"Ticketing companies run complex transactional systems that need to cater for large spikes in demand, particularly

when a popular event goes on sale," he says. "There are many technical innovations that allow a ticketing company to handle large volumes, but these may not be available to those tied to older ticketing technology."

"Cloud computing, as an example, offers an opportunity for a ticketing company to scale their systems to handle any sized capacity, but requires a degree of integration and capability that may not be possible on older systems. Having used this capability

Some ticketing agencies may not be able to take advantage of new and improved technology that can provide a better experience for consumers

recently, we were successfully able to cater for the expected high consumer demand of a popular event."

So while there's a hefty price tag attached to the use of the two big ticketing agencies, they may not be best placed to take advantage of new and improved technology that can provide a better experience for

consumers. The trouble is, thanks to contracts that bind certain venues and events to the two, there's no incentive to improve.

"Generally, large venues that commonly host sell-out events have multi-year contracts with particular ticketing agencies," says Marnane. "This means venue managers and promoters have limited options if they're unhappy with

the service they receive and the experience their consumers go through during the ticket-purchasing process."

Scalping pain

Gaynor Jenkins is 15 years old and a big fan of UK boy band One Direction. When the group announced it was coming down under for a whirlwind East Coast tour in April this year, she was desperate to get her hands on tickets, which went on sale at 9am Eastern Standard Time on 6 March. Unfortunately, Perth resident Jenkins didn't realise she would have to account for the time difference. By the time she did, it was too late.

"They're very popular and they haven't come to Australia before so everyone was on a high," she says. "But the show sold out in three minutes, there were no tickets left at all! I couldn't believe it, I was so shocked."

I'd already booked my flight to Brisbane, because they weren't playing in Perth."

When Jenkins searched for tickets to the show on eBay, she discovered

she could still attend – at a high price.

Reely outrageous

Why is it that when you go to the movies, whether at Hoyts, Event, Village or Palace cinemas, you get slugged a \$1-1.10 fee for booking your ticket online, when no such fee is charged for walk-up customers?

Village states this booking fee "covers the administration, development and maintenance required to provide this convenient service to our customers". Hoyts explains the fee as a payment for premium service: "The main benefit in purchasing tickets online is that you will receive priority service when you collect your tickets. Hoyts Red Carpet delivers a fast and easy way to collect online tickets from a busy box office environment. You are also

guaranteed seats for the session and cinema of your choice."

CHOICE believes online bookings save cinemas time and money – instead of having to pay a staff member to select seats, speak with a customer and process payment, the customer does this work for them. Encouraging online bookings also helps cinemas project demand for movie sessions. As one annoyed cinema-goer, Russell Barnett, asks: "Shouldn't doing all the work entitle the consumer to a discounted ticket?"





"I went on eBay and there was a pair of tickets being sold by someone for \$4000 each. Two tickets that should have been \$79!"

Ticket scalping is the resale of tickets at a premium price by someone who has not been authorised by the presenter to do so. Like those \$4000 tickets to One Direction, tickets of every description to sold-out events are traded openly on eBay.

"People make a living off scalping," says Cormick.

"They hog everyone's tickets and sell them for ridiculous prices." But while fans may be tempted to buy tickets from online scalpers, there are a few things to consider despite the high feedback scores of some sellers. In some states, scalping tickets for sporting events is illegal and those caught engaging in it can face large fines.

Live Performance Australia (LPA) is the peak body for the live entertainment and performing arts industry. Ticket sales through member agencies are bound by the LPA Ticketing Codes of Practice. Under these codes, ticket scalping constitutes a breach of terms and conditions, and LPA members may cancel scalped tickets without providing a refund.

Lucy Smith (not her real name) is an industry insider with extensive experience working at a major venue and for a promoter.

"Promoters and ticketing agencies are looking out on eBay for the novice who has printed their ticket number, or who has taken a photo of a part of the ticket we can use to identify the person who bought it," she says.

"Agencies are also bound where possible if they can to void the ticket. The good thing is if they've got the barcodes they can cancel them."

Aside from cancelling scalped tickets, some ticketing agencies are also attempting to discourage scalping in other ways. Ticketek and Ticketmaster, for example, limit the maximum number of tickets that can be purchased in one transaction.

Moshitix aims to deter scalping by, according to Marnane, "collecting the name and date of birth of attendees at time of purchase and printing these on the tickets, limiting the number of tickets able to be purchased in each transaction... [and] cancelling tickets on discovery of a re-sale attempt not in accordance with a Moshitix-supported process."

Cancellation fixation

There are some benefits to buying tickets through established ticketing vendors. Some, including Ticketmaster, Ticketek and Moshitix, offer refunds in cases where events are cancelled or postponed. Ticketek and Ticketmaster

both also sell ticket insurance, which allows customers to seek a refund in certain circumstances. But if a ticket is purchased through a scalper, or directly from a promoter, the consumer may not be so lucky.

Jen scored tickets to the Playground Weekender music festival, to be held at Wisemans Ferry in NSW in March earlier this year. Trouble was, no-one anticipated the fact that the heavens might open and the Hawkesbury River would be a no-go zone. The event's organisers cancelled the event just a few days before it was set to run, claiming "... a natural disaster is not something a small business such as Playground Festivals Pty Ltd has been able to cope with."

Some foiled festival goers, such as those who paid by credit card or PayPal within a certain period of time before the festival, were able to receive a refund. But others, like Jen were not so lucky.

"My friend paid for our tickets with PayPal, but apparently you can only dispute this up until 45 days after the transaction and he got our tickets a while ago," she says. "He's still trying to get the money back." ■

18m

Number of tickets Ticketek says it processes every year

23,000

Number of events Ticketek and Ticketmaster claim to ticket annually

\$2.5m

Penalty imposed in 2011 on Ticketek for taking advantage of its market power over Lastix

CHOICE verdict

When you buy tickets from ticketing agencies such as Ticketek and Ticketmaster, you pay a double commission in the form of the inside and outside charges – and you're even paying to use your own ink and paper to print out your ticket at home. Consumers should not be continually frustrated by outdated booking systems, especially when paying top dollar to use them. CHOICE believes all components of a ticket price should be revealed to consumers up-front.



Shades of grey

It's called the grey market, but is parallel importing really as murky as it's made out to be? **Elise Dalley** finds out

How can some products look, taste and function the same, yet vary so markedly in price from their mainstream, retail counterparts?

Parallel imports are shipped in from abroad without the permission of the local trademark or intellectual property owner. Essentially, they're legitimate products that dodge standard distribution channels and, as a result, can arrive in our shopping

basket for a fraction of the local recommended retail price (RRP).

For years, multinational companies have set different retail prices for the same product in different countries. That was, at least, until the boom in online shopping. For the consumer, this has meant one thing: markets have merged, and this sort of price discrimination – on everything from Mars Bars to digital cameras and even French champagne – is being put to the test.

All things electronic

Mention Hong Kong, Taiwan or Tokyo to an electronics aficionado and their eyes light up. These cities have giant malls dedicated to all things electronic. TVs, digital cameras, mobile phones – the list goes on, and thanks to the internet, they're closer to us than ever before.

Ruslan Kogan, a pioneer of parallel imports in the electronics market, saw business sense in bringing these products to Australians at a discounted price years ago. Seeing a gap in the market, in 2006 he started up a business to fill it, and just five years later was listed on *BRW*'s Young Rich List with a reported fortune of \$62m.

PARALLEL PEACE OF MIND

- **Watch out for incompatible plugs with electrical products purchased overseas.** If you're happy to purchase an adapter, this won't be a problem
- **Be sure you have access to an English language manual** for electronic parallel products – not all include one
- **Check the ingredients lists** and keep an eye out for any allergens with food products
- **Avoid food and grocery products with non-English language labels** if you don't understand them

Same product, parallel packaging



"Global consumer electronic brands provide lower wholesale prices in emerging markets such as China and India than mature economic countries... These emerging markets also have much lower supply chain costs due to lower local wages, consumer protection standards and weaker regulation. This allows wholesalers in those emerging markets to offer these prices to overseas buyers at lower prices than a local importer in a mature market is able to achieve."

—JB Hi-Fi Direct Import website

Kogan hopes the growth of online retailing will make large manufacturers more accountable for price discrimination. "Australians have been getting ripped off by big retailers for far too long and we're here to change that," he says.

Kogan's prices sit anywhere between 15–40% below the local RRP on a range of electronic goods, he claims. Canon's newest entry-level digital SLR camera, the 600D twin lens package, is available on his site for \$809 plus \$39 delivery, yet retails in shops for up to 30% more.

Retailer JB Hi-Fi launched its Direct Import camera e-tailer earlier this year in response to the growth of online shopping. Its import price for the same camera is similar to Kogan's – \$835 plus delivery. This is noticeably cheaper than its bricks-and-mortar stores, which sell the same camera, imported through conventional supply channels, for \$258 more.

Can they do that?

Intellectual property legislation allows most parallel importers to bring products freely into Australia. The 2011 Productivity Commission's retail inquiry found the arguments made by multinationals in defending price discrimination were not persuasive.

Governments and consumers are eager to talk about parallel imports – companies involved less so

Treating consumers in one region as willing or able to tolerate significantly higher prices than those in other countries was a key reason listed by the Productivity Commission for growth in parallel imports, and formed a basis of their recommendation to government to reconsider the restrictions relating to the parallel importation of clothing.

Governments and consumers are eager to talk about parallel importation, but CHOICE found companies involved on both sides of the fence were less so. Mars Incorporated told us it was unable to provide a list of its RRP's around the world, despite the fact an Australian Mars Bar costs almost double that of the same product in the UK. JB Hi-Fi also declined to comment.

Australian Consumer Law provides welcome protection for buyers, as local manufacturers can be hesitant to uphold warranties for imported products. All consumers are entitled to a guarantee of acceptable quality, fitness for purpose and

right to repair on all products purchased from an Australian retailer. Kogan and JB Hi-Fi's Direct Import both also offer in-house warranties.

Are food and groceries safe?

Consumer items that have a quick turnover, including chocolates, soft drinks and

personal care products, can be found in bargain basements and local corner stores around the country. Demand for cheaper groceries is fuelling the growing movement of parallel products into this sector, boosting competition and bringing prices down. ▶



Australian Pantene shampoo (left) and the parallel import (right)



Coke around the world

US\$1.35 for 1.5L
New York from
D'Agostino

\$2.00 for 1.5L
Australia parallel
import from Asia
(bought at Reject
Shop)

NZ\$3.29 for 1.5L
New Zealand from
Countdown

£1.65 for 1.5L
London from
Sainsbury's

\$3.21 for 1.5L
Australia
from Coles



THE WAY FORWARD

The experts we spoke with all agree on one thing – the online world is moving fast, and large companies will need to minimise price discrimination and become more competitive sooner rather than later in order to stay afloat.

Later this year, a parliamentary inquiry will question Apple, Microsoft and other multinational tech companies that participate in geographic price discrimination. Federal MP Ed Husic, who's been lobbying in this area for more than a year, hopes the inquiry will bring an end to the unfair pricing burden placed on Australians.

But Tony Mahar, director of sustainable development and trade at the Australian Food and Grocery Council (AFGC), suggests this may not all be good news for consumers. Manufacturing processes overseas are not always as stringent as Australian standards, particularly when it comes to allergens, and Mahar believes a proportion of parallel imports aren't correctly labelled with ingredients or allergen warnings before they hit the shelves.

CHOICE shopped at a number of discount stores, and the parallel products we found complied with local labelling regulations. But some retailers haven't always been so compliant.

In the past two years, the NSW Food Authority has issued a number of fines to businesses that have failed to provide consumers with adequate labelling information on parallel-imported products.

The AFGC says product recall and quality control mechanisms are also questionable for some parallel products. This year alone, the ACCC has recalled more than 20 food and grocery products for posing a risk to consumers. But recalling a product that has entered the country through the unconventional channels may not be so straightforward.

Few consumers will complain about a half-price bottle of Bollinger

Bubbling up

It's not only \$2 shops that have tapped into the parallel import movement. A growing number of local retailers have developed a taste for parallel-imported French champagne – and few consumers will complain about a half-price bottle of Bollinger. After all, Australians drank 4.86 million bottles of French champagne in 2011, up 25% on the previous year, according to champagne expert Tyson Stetler.

In a recent blind taste test conducted by Stetler, a panel of experts preferred parallel-imported champagne on four out of seven occasions. He believes concerns raised by traditional importers about inadequate refrigeration and handling during the shipping of parallel imports are largely unfounded.

"From the consumer's perspective, parallel importing can be a positive thing," says Stetler. "It helps to stimulate positive competition in the market".

What CHOICE wants

Parallel importation can help level the playing field for Australian consumers who are routinely slugged with higher prices for goods produced by multinational companies. But despite injecting much-needed competition into the local market, parallel importation should also comply with Australian safety and labelling and requires a strong regulatory framework so that it can work in the best interest of consumers. ■

Plunder down under

The world's biggest companies are some of the worst offenders when it comes to price discrimination. Amazon sells its Kindle e-reader for US\$79 in the US, but Australians must pay \$109 for the same product. In the US iTunes store, the Beatles No. 1 album sells for US\$12.99, yet Australians fork out almost 60% more to buy this album from an Australian IP address. The latest Apple iPad 32GB Wi-Fi model retails for \$649 in Australian stores, but sells for US\$599 in the US.





Hold the meat

How do the major chains stack up when it comes to healthy vegetarian fast food? Rachel Clemons tucks into the facts and figures

There's no denying the popularity and convenience of fast food, but finding healthy options isn't easy, as our fast food survival guide found (*CHOICE*, June 2011). So what chance do you have if

you're vegetarian or attempting to reduce your meat intake and choose healthier food when eating out?

CHOICE looked at 12 national fast food chains and reviewed the online menus and nutrition information for more than

80 meat-free meals – see The Veggie Stack, page 24 and 25. Some chains don't even give vegetarians a look-in, but when they do, the options are often limited. And don't assume the veggie meal will always be the healthiest option on the menu – or even that it will be suitable for vegetarians.

What's in a name?

According to Vegetarian Victoria, there are several different forms of vegetarianism.

- **Lacto-ovo-vegetarians** don't eat meat, poultry, fish or seafood but do eat milk, dairy products and eggs.
- A **pure vegetarian's** diet comprises vegetables, vegetable oils, grains,

legumes such as lentils, chickpeas and dried or canned beans, soy products such as tofu and tempeh, nuts, fruit and seeds, but no meat, poultry, fish, seafood, milk, dairy or eggs (honey is usually optional).

- **Vegans** are pure vegetarians who exclude animal products from their entire lifestyle (leather clothing, for example).

The problem with protein

Fast food chains often create a vegetarian meal by replacing the meat protein component of the dish with cheese. The result can be tasty, but it also bumps up both the salt and saturated fat content of the meal.

Domino's Simply Cheese and Pizza Hut's Signature Four Cheese pizzas are prime examples. Eating just one slice can contribute a sizeable chunk to the maximum recommended daily intake ▶





(RDI) of both, but chewing through two or more slices can break the nutritional bank – and don't even think of ordering either with the optional cheesy crusts both chains offer. Cheese can even play havoc with a salad. A regular-size Sumo Salad Balsamic Beetroot salad has 1908mg of sodium – 83% of your maximum RDI.

All nutrition data shown is per serve. Where the serve size options were small, regular or large we used information for regular, and if the options were small or large we used small. The total daily intake for the average adult is 8700kJ, 24g saturated fat and 2300mg sodium – but needs vary depending on your gender, size and activity level. Requirements for many people will be much lower.

The veggie stack

VEGGIE QUESTION MARK

These chains didn't respond to our survey, and while they do have veggie menu items we can't guarantee the ingredients are free from animal by-products.

Oporto A representative told us vegetarian choices aren't part of Oporto's primary offering, although its Veggie Burger is one of seven burgers on the menu. Unfortunately

for vegetarians, it has more saturated fat than any – and more sodium than most – of Oporto's single and double fillet meat burgers.

Nando's offers a veggie patty that you can have either in pita bread or as a burger. The Vege Pita is the healthier (and smaller) option, providing fewer kilojoules and less saturated fat and sodium than the Vege Burger.

Veggie offerings that use plant protein sources instead of cheese tend to be more nutritious. Lentils, chickpeas, beans, nuts and tofu are higher in fibre, antioxidants and other protective phytochemicals, without the sodium and saturated fat.

VEGGIE-WHO?

KFC and Red Rooster both declined to participate in our survey, saying vegetarian options aren't part of their primary offering. So unless you're happy to cobble together a meal by ordering sides such as fries, mashed potato, coleslaw, corn, peas, dinner rolls or garlic bread, vegetarians are better off eating elsewhere.

McDonald's The majority of its McCafé menu items are suitable for vegetarians, but as McDonald's classes them as snacks – and the McCafé menu isn't available at all McDonald's outlets – we didn't include them in our review. There are no vegetarian choices on its regular menu other than sides such as a garden salad or fries.

VEGGIES BEWARE

These chains' meat-free offerings contain ingredients that render them unsuitable for vegetarians.

Hungry Jack's Veggie Burger contains 66% of the maximum recommended daily sodium intake, a hefty serving of saturated fat (45% of the RDI) – Hungry

Jack's has meat options with less) and more kilojoules per serve than any other vegetarian meal in our review – 34% of the RDI. Worse, both the cheese and veggie patty in the burger likely contain animal rennet – see May Contain Traces of Cow, above.



Pizza Hut has one vegetarian pasta and eight different meat-free pizza toppings on the menu. Even the healthier options push the kilojoule, sat fat and sodium boundaries, so limit the number of slices you eat and avoid the cheesy toppings and cheese-stuffed crusts. Choosing the Mia Veggie (Perfecto crust) over the Signature Four Cheese (Perfecto crust) reduces your sat fat intake by 62%.

May contain traces of cow

Strictly speaking, foods that contain animal by-products such as gelatine, animal-derived rennet or animal fat are a no-no for all types of vegetarians (see What's in a Name?, page 23). Cheese-laden veggie menu items in particular are a potential minefield for vegetarians, as cheese commonly contains animal-derived rennet. So we asked each chain if any of its non-meat menu items contain animal by-products.

- McDonald's infamously once used beef tallow as its frying oil, but told us it now uses a vegetable oil blend to cook its fries.
- Hungry Jack's told us it doesn't market any of its products as vegetarian and that the cheese in its Veggie Burger may contain animal rennet. Its website states that both the veggie patty and cheese contain animal rennet, but Hungry Jack's didn't respond to our requests for confirmation.

- Subway's cheese contains animal rennet – but its vegetarian menu options are cheese-free.
- The four pizzas on the Domino's menu marked "V" for vegetarian feature animal rennet-free cheese.
- Go Sushi and Sumo Salad told us their non-meat menu items are free from animal by-products.

The other chains didn't respond to our queries. ■

VEGGIES GET A LOOK-IN

Domino's Four pizzas on the Domino's menu are flagged as vegetarian. The healthier of these options still make a sizeable contribution to your intake of kilojoules, saturated fat and sodium, so limit the number of slices you eat and avoid cheesy toppings and stuffed crusts. You can reduce your sat fat intake by 78% by choosing the Vegorama (Classic crust) over the Simply Cheese (Square Puff crust).

Go Sushi has five options on the menu suitable for vegetarians. The hazard with sushi rolls is the salt – just one 110g Veggie Deluxe Sushi Roll has 689mg sodium, or 30% of the maximum RDI. So if you're watching your salt intake, stop at one roll and hold off on the soy sauce.

Subway The Subway menu has two vegetarian fillings available in the form of a sub, wrap or salad, although all menu items can be tailored to your requirements on request. The veggie menu items are cheese-free, but don't be tempted to ask for a slice as their cheese contains rennet. The dressings and sauces on offer also bump up the kilojoules, sat fat and sodium.

Sumo Salad Vegetarian options abound at this chain – more than 30 at our count. While the options are generally healthy, a few have nutritional drawbacks, such as the 11.9g saturated fat (50% of the RDI) in its Pear, Brie & Rocket Long Roll and the 1908mg sodium (83% of the maximum RDI) in its Balsamic Beetroot Salad (regular).

BEYOND THE BIG CHAINS

- **Grill'd** (ACT, NSW, Qld, Vic, WA) offers a selection of genuinely veggie burgers.
- Falafels reign at **Sabbaba** (NSW) and **Ali Baba** (ACT, NSW, Qld, Vic), with Ali Baba even using different equipment and utensils to prepare vegetarian meal options to avoid cross-contamination. All menu items at falafel chain **Maaz** (WA) are vegetarian-friendly.
- The entire menu at **Lord of the Fries** (Vic) is 100% vegetarian – made from textured vegetable protein, they have patties and hot dogs with the taste and texture of beef and chicken.
- A hot dog vendor is unlikely to be a vegetarian's first port of call, but the potato, smoked apple and sage offering from **Snagstand** (NSW, Vic) may change this.
- **Pie Face** (ACT, NSW, Vic, Qld) has vegetarian pies, sausage rolls and other savouries on the menu.

Tell us about your favourite veggie fast food chains at choice.com.au/veggiefastfood, where you'll also find expert tips on choosing healthy options





Through the roof

Is charging tenants a fee to pay their rent even legal?
Andy Kollmorgen looks into a disturbing trend

Being charged a fee to pay your rent sounds like it should be illegal – and in some cases it is. But that hasn't stopped some rental agents from achieving the nifty stunt of outsourcing rent processing and having tenants pick up the tab.

Lynda K from Adelaide, a single mum with four kids and a tight household budget, tells CHOICE her rental agent requires her to use Rental Rewards, a third-party payment scheme that charges her a 1.75% fee per transaction. That's a \$6.13 weekly payment on top of her \$350 rent, a cost Lynda must wear. She pays by credit card because she's worried she'll be hit with a \$15 dishonour charge by Rental Rewards and face a \$10 fee from her bank should she use the direct debit option (a comparatively modest \$1.50 per week) and there's not enough cash in the account on a given week.

Lynda says she doesn't want to confront the rental agent about having to pay an extra \$319 a year to save him the trouble of dealing with rent collection, fearing she won't have her

she acknowledged the 1.75% may be an earlier pricing system. Company spokesperson Kevin Butler requested we submit our questions via email but didn't respond before we went to print.

Rent payment scheme providers may be engaging in the prohibited practice of "third line forcing"

lease renewed. (Finding the rental in the first place was an ordeal.) In paying by credit card, she earns Qantas and Myer rewards points, but Lynda has no interest in either. Her take on the situation is unequivocal: "It shouldn't cost you anything to pay your rent."

A Rental Rewards customer service agent gave us a somewhat different account of pricing, saying the fee is 1.1% plus \$2 for transactions less than \$5000 using Visa or MasterCard and 1.1% plus \$10 using Amex or Diners Club, though

Other rent payment schemes include Rentpay and Rent Mate, while Corum Real Estate Services operates a payment scheme using TransCard and Century 21 Easypay Card.

State of the states

The Tenants Union of Victoria suggests payment scheme providers may be engaging in the prohibited practice of "third line forcing" when tenants are required to use a scheme and no alternative is offered, but the application

160

The number of complaints about rent payment schemes in Victoria in 2010-11

"It's an offensive principle that you should have to pay to have your rent collected"



"The alternatives were to pay by cheque or cash at the real estate office or mail a cheque to the agent," he says. "These options were inconvenient because I work full-time and, not having a cheque book, I would have had to pay the bank for cheques, trading one fee for another."

Toby Archer of the Tenants Union of Victoria says the agency received 160 complaints about rent payment schemes in 2010-11, though the state currently doesn't require rental agents to provide convenient, fee-free options to third-party schemes. "Rental agents are offering payment methods that aren't practically feasible for clients," Archer admits, adding that Victoria is watching developments in NSW closely.

Martin says the recent reforms in NSW "have done a reasonable job of fixing the problem" but believes the schemes remain a raw deal for renters. "Agents are simultaneously reducing their processing costs and making someone else pay for it. It's just amazing, really. It's an offensive principle that you should pay to have your rent collected." ■

says the state updated its Residential Tenancies Act in 2010 to address this very issue. The law now prevents agents from pulling a switch on payment methods mid-lease and requires them to offer a "reasonably available" fee-free alternative at all times. According to Martin, under the previous version of the act "there wasn't anything you could do about it".

If the alternative method is not reasonably available, NSW renters should lodge a complaint with NSW Fair Trading and contact the Tenants Union (02 8117 3700), Martin says. "We'd be interested in hearing from anyone having trouble with the provisions of the new legislation."

Martin's colleague Ned Cutcher adds that the right for third-party schemes to charge penalty fees is also open to legal debate. "The Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal would probably take that up and challenge it as well."

How easy it is to use a fee-free method – and whether there is one – may turn out to be a decisive factor in any legal challenge to these schemes. Another SA renter, Martin W, told us his rental agent offered a fee-free alternative but he was still stuck paying through Rental Rewards.

Meagre rewards

Rental Rewards lists 19 real estate companies as participants, including offices from those with big market share such as LJ Hooker and Ray White as well as numerous individual agencies. The company says renters benefit by earning Qantas and Myer rewards points on their credit cards, though both consumers and the tenant unions of NSW and Victoria tell us that paying by

credit card slaps renters with the highest weekly fees – as much as \$26 per month on a monthly rent of \$1500. And redemption of the points depends on the terms and conditions of your credit card, irrespective of the Rental Rewards program. In any case, our previous research into card reward programs indicate they're rarely good value for money – and your personal details will likely be collected and used by the provider.

of this longstanding aspect of consumer law to the third-party rent payment industry is a work in progress. The ACCC says it's up to individual states to decide whether violations are taking place.

Deputy commissioner for consumer affairs at South Australia's Consumer and Business Services, Anne Gale, told us it's only illegal in SA to make tenants change their method of payment mid-lease. "There is currently nothing in the [SA] legislation that prevents agents from offering third-party rent payment schemes as the only method that will be accepted for paying rent. However, this matter is being looked at as part of a review of the Residential Tenancies Act."

Senior policy officer Chris Martin of the Tenants Union of New South Wales



Chemical Couture

We all know about toxins in pesticides, but what about those in your clothes, asks **Kate Browne**

Problems with toxic clothing in Australia can be, in some ways, traced back to a humble pair of woollen underpants bought by a doctor in Adelaide in 1931. He wore them without washing them first, and this caused a severe allergic reaction to sulphites in the fabric that landed him in hospital close to death and, sometime later, in court.

The doctor won his case against the manufacturer, who was found not to have provided due care that the garment in question should be fit for the purpose for

Australia. Product safety regulations here are narrow compared with other countries, particularly those in Europe, which have had rigorous product safety legislation regulating the use of harmful chemical substances since the mid-1990s. The current European Union legislation (called EU REACH) now requires all TCF brands and retailers selling into the EU market to manage more than 300,000 harmful substances in their products. This program also sets maximum limits for TCF products that come into contact with human skin.

"We have strong regulation of imported food but we're not even thinking about regulating the levels of chemicals being used in clothing processes"

which it was intended. Those underpants formed the basis of one of Australia's first consumer law cases.

In 2012, in stark contrast to a number of other developed countries, little has changed for the better when it comes to regulating the chemicals in imported textiles, clothing and footwear (TCF) in Australia. And with more than 90% of the apparel found in our stores imported – and an obsession with what's been nicknamed "fast fashion" – Australian retailers are under pressure to put more product on the shelves, more often. The downside of this demand, many in the textiles industry believe, is product safety, with the safe use of chemicals a particular concern.

Where's the regulation?

While product safety is a hot legislative topic in other countries, it isn't in

While the basic structure and function of EU REACH program and the Australian equivalent NICNAS (National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme) are fundamentally the same, in that they provide a list of harmful chemical substances that apply to all sectors of our economy, this is where the similarity ends. NICNAS only lists about 50,000 chemical substances and limits its role to notification and assessment of the use of these chemicals.

There are no legally prescribed limits on the use in textiles of any of these chemicals. So while it would be impossible to import some of these chemicals to use in Australia, there would be no problem having the very same chemicals arrive in an order of T-shirts from overseas.



ber of industry stakeholders, including members of CSIRO, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, the National Toxics Network and the Australian Wool Testing Authority, recently joined the Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia (TFIA) to work on the issue of product safety.

What about you and me?

The industry experts CHOICE spoke to say most Australians consumers are unaware of the potential toxicity to be found in TCF products.

Andreas Schimkus, TFIA's senior industry adviser, spent four years in Hong Kong supplying footwear to the EU market and says he was shocked by the lack of active regulation in the Australian market when he first arrived here. "Products that are made in China for the Australian market could not even be sent back to China, as many of them would not meet the Chinese product safety standards but are acceptable here."

Dr Mariann Lloyd-Smith, senior adviser to the National Toxics Network and IPEN (the international public interest NGO on harmful substances), says she has heard about a number of incidents relating to clothing and shoes that can be the result of everything from DMF, formaldehyde and dyes.

"The most dangerous way for a toxin to enter the body is not through the digestive system, but through the skin," says Schimkus. "We have strong

regulation and monitoring of imported food but we're not even thinking about regulating the levels of chemicals being used in clothing processes such as fabric treatments, dyes and printing or in the creation of synthetic fibres derived from petroleum-based feed stocks."

And while consumer reactions to clothing and footwear aren't rife, there are industry concerns that an issue that shouldn't exist at all is growing.

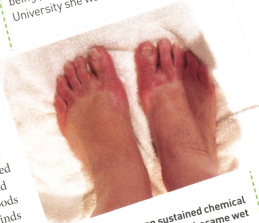
Poison chairs and shoes

Another chemical of concern commonly used in Australia is dimethyl fumarate (DMF), which is used to prevent mould and moisture in leather goods and can be found in all kinds of leather goods – from furniture to school shoes – usually in the form of a small sachet. DMF has been found to be an allergic sensitiser at very low concentrations, producing extensive, pronounced eczema that is difficult to treat. In the EU, the use of DMF for consumer products is banned, including imported products.

DMF gained notoriety overseas during the so-called "poison chair" incident. A Chinese furniture manufacturer produced sofas with DMF sachets inside to inhibit mould while they were in storage or transport. In the UK, sofas containing the chemical caused severe injuries to more than 400 people, including 55 small children. By 2010, several retailers were ▶

SHOES THAT BURN

A Victorian woman bought a pair of canvas and rubber ballet-style shoes from a large shopping centre in Melbourne. After she wore them in the rain she developed what appeared to be chemical burns on her feet where the shoes had made contact. After being put in contact with Monash University she was shown photos



A Victorian woman sustained chemical burns when her shoes became wet

of other people who'd had a similar reaction to the same brand of shoes.

It's believed the shoes were treated with a chemical that is used as a fungicide and rubber accelerator – which was easily released when the shoes got wet.



ordered to pay £20m to those who received chemical burns.

Yet in Australia, imported products containing DMF aren't monitored at all. To highlight this risk, the product safety group headed up by TFIA recently bought 13 pairs of shoes from a department store in Melbourne and sent them for testing for DMF at the CSIRO. Three pairs contained levels far higher than what's considered acceptable. One of these pairs was a popular brand of children's school shoes. According to Schimkus, this small sample shows how common the issue is. "It's not like we bought hundreds of pairs

it makes a quick detour via charities – and there are industry concerns that the potentially harmful substances in these dumped textiles may leach out into the environment.

"We regularly see examples where local traders buy 500 T-shirts in China [sell 350 shirts] and dump the remaining 150 pieces, simply because it's cheaper," says Andrew Mills, managing director of textiles company Charles Parsons.

Emer Diviney, former manager of Ethical Clothing Australia, argues that with the current regulation, Australia is a fertile ground for dumping substandard

There are concerns **potentially harmful substances** in dumped textiles **may leach into the environment**

of shoes – we went out in one day and bought a small sample and the results speak for themselves."

"This isn't an acceptable outcome," adds Lloyd-Smith. "This testing is a real alarm bell."

What a dump

In Australia, almost 100% of textile waste goes into landfill – even if

product at incredibly low prices. However, the ACCC says it has not uncovered any evidence of dumping unsafe TCF products onto our market. "There is also no injury data that supports the view that TCF articles available in Australia are less safe than in other markets," says ACCC spokesperson Brent Rebecca.

What's the story here?

Regulation of the product safety of chemicals in imported textiles sits with the ACCC. NICNAS is the agency responsible for the expert risk assessment and regulation of industrial chemicals.

The ACCC says it has a number of active programs aimed at identifying and assessing emerging hazards (including chemical hazards), which include expanded consumer protection provisions and a mandatory injury-reporting regime that requires suppliers to report product-related incidents where a death or serious

HIVES ALL OVER

A Sydney mum bought a new school T-shirt for her 10-year-old son from the school uniform shop. He put it on and headed off to school. He says that by early afternoon he had a lump on his neck, and not long after his entire back was covered in hives.

By the time he arrived home in the evening his mother was shocked to discover he had hives all over his body – what she describes as "clumps and welts" – and some were as big as his hand. He and his



mother believe they were directly caused by wearing the new shirt without washing it first.



illness/injury has occurred. Rebecca also says that the ACCC's analysis of complaints and injury reports has found a very low number of alleged injuries associated with TCF.

Who's doing it right?

The experts we spoke to say the EU approach stands out as the model other countries are adopting to ensure consumers are protected. From an extensive list of restricted substances, there are "substances of very high concern" (see below right) that the EU regulates more closely as potentially harmful to human health.

What you can do

- ✓ Our experts suggest washing any new clothes twice before wearing, although washing won't remove certain types of chemicals.
- ✓ Shop for natural fibres, cotton, linen and wool, particularly for children.
- ✓ Look for organic cottons, as well as natural and vegetable dyes.
- ✓ Avoid products labelled stain- or water-resistant unless the manufacturer provides details of the chemicals or processes used.
- ✓ If you do have concerns about or an injury from clothing or footwear, you can lodge a complaint with the ACCC on 1300 303 609.

Where to next?

According to the ACCC, suppliers of consumer goods are responsible for ensuring they comply with the law and are fit for purpose and safe use. Under the Australian Consumer Law, suppliers are also obliged to report any serious injuries associated with the use of products they supply to the ACCC. This enables actions to be taken to protect consumers where unsafe goods are identified.

However, members of the TFIA project safety group say this isn't enough and that change is required. Lloyd-Smith believes there needs to be a clear regulatory system that restricts or bans the use of many of the most hazardous chemicals

(starting with the industrial ones banned elsewhere) and limits imports of products treated with them.

"Unless the regulations are there, companies chasing profits will not move," she says. "But one thing is clear – the ACCC is far from adequate to address this problem, and NICNAS does not regulate products. It's woefully underfunded to assess even the priority chemicals, and too many are simply falling through the cracks." ■

On the radar

These are some of the substances of very high concern that have been identified by EU REACH:

- **Chrome VI** used on leather, new wool. Textiles and leather treated with chromate can cause or exacerbate contact dermatitis.
- **DMF** (see page 29)
- **Phthalates** used in PVC for shoes and rainwear are suspected of being carcinogenic and may disturb the hormone system.
- **Alkphenols** used for textile and leather production. Strong disruptors of the human endocrine system and environmentally toxic.
- **Allergy-causing dispersion dyes**
A colourant, these can cause allergy and rashes.

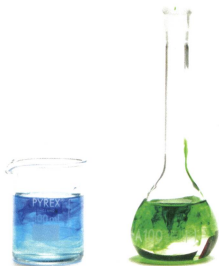
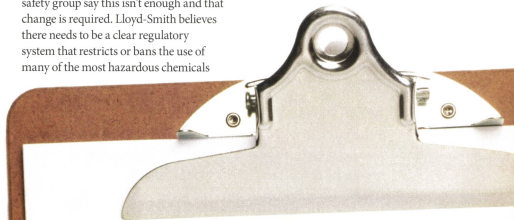
Some of the most harmful are:

AZO colourants AZO dyes are often used in the colouring process for textiles and leather products. Recently it has been recognised that some AZO colouring agents

may form amines (breakdown products) that may have carcinogenic and mutagenic (an agent changing genetic material) properties.

Chlorine phenols (PCP, TeCP, TricP) used in the processing of textiles. Contact with PCP (particularly in the form of vapour) can irritate the skin, eyes and mouth. Long-term exposure to low levels can cause damage to the liver, kidneys, blood and nervous system. Exposure to PCP is also associated with carcinogenic, renal and neurological effects.

Formaldehyde is used to "finish" fabric. Exposure to low levels irritates the eyes, nose, throat and can cause allergies affecting the skin and lungs. Higher exposure can cause throat spasms and build up of fluid in the lungs, leading to death. Contact can also cause severe eye and skin burns with permanent damage. It is classified as a potential carcinogen.





Deeper and deeper

The TV ads promise much, but debt consolidation is no miracle cure. **Andy Kollmorgen** sheds some light on a shady industry

Despite the sobering effects of the GFC, Australia's borrowing binge continues. The RBA tally on credit card debt as of February this year was about \$50bn, or around \$2272 each for every Australian – one of the highest levels of consumer debt on the planet.

Paying credit card interest rates as high as 20% or more (plus fees), it's not hard to fall behind – and many consumers appear to be doing just that. Over the past two years there's been a big jump in financial difficulty disputes reported to the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS). Its most recent annual review shows an increase of 130% between 2009-10 and 2010-11, 94% of which had to do with consumer credit.

A quick fix?

Debt consolidation businesses advertise themselves as a quick way to get the monkey off your back, but you could end

up paying more in the long run than you would dealing directly with the creditors. Your credit rating might take a blow, too.

Transparency and trust are the main issues at stake. CHOICE called a number of debt consolidation agencies to ask about fees, but we were told the information would only be made available after we'd surrendered a raft of personal details and, in effect, registered with the company and agreed on a plan.

Yvonne Best of the government's Insolvency and Trustee Service Australia says this lack of disclosure isn't surprising, since these services "are in the business to make money". She suggests talking to a financial counsellor

rather than going through a debt consolidation business. A list of counsellors in your state is on the service's website at itsa.gov.au – look under "information for debtors". You can also check the services listed on www.financialcounsellingaustralia.org.au.

But you can also just deal with the creditor directly. If you've fallen into debt due to extenuating circumstances such as losing your job, the Uniform Consumer

Credit Code (UCCC) gives you the right to ask your creditors to revise the terms of payment through a hardship variation. You can also ask to revise the terms if you simply don't have the money to pay what you owe, but the terms of repayment may be more stringent.

Through the hardship variation,

\$2272
Average individual credit card debt for every Australian as of February 2012





you may be allowed to extend the duration of your debt and make smaller payments or put the debt on hold until you can start repaying it. Creditors must consider your case and respond within 21 days. If they knock you back, the FOS or Credit Ombudsman Service can intervene on your behalf (both can be contacted on 1300 780 808). Under the law, creditors or collection agencies aren't allowed to mislead those in debt into thinking a new repayment plan is not available, nor are they allowed to harass a debtor in any way,

Rolling your credit card debt into your mortgage is rarely a good idea as your house will be on the line

including using disrespectful or abusive language. And in the case of bankruptcy, creditors of unsecured debt such as credit cards have to stop all collection activity.

There's a much higher risk for those who fall behind on secured debts such as mortgages and look for a consolidation solution. Rolling your credit card debt into your mortgage, for instance, is rarely a good idea, since your house will be on the line if you can't meet the payments. And refinancing or finding a new loan may mean you'll end up paying much more down the road and may be blindsided by exit and start-up fees as well as valuation

and stamp duty. The UCCCL also applies to mortgages, so talking to your lender should be your first step. If you refinance, be absolutely sure you'll be paying less.

A certain breed of brokers and lenders preys on consumers desperate to keep their homes. The insidious practice of "equity stripping" has seen homeowners surrender up to 20% of the equity in their homes in fees for new loans before they understood they'd been had. Worse, interest can skyrocket to as much as 50% in the case of default. In some cases, the best strategy is to sell your home on your own terms and downsize your living arrangements rather than let your creditor sell it.

Misleading marketing

Saskia ten Dam, a long-serving financial counsellor at Townsville Legal Service, says most businesses that advertise themselves as debt consolidators are actually just debt agreement administrators operating under Part IX of the Bankruptcy Act – something you could negotiate with your creditors on your own. Unlike bona fide banks, they can't provide consolidation loans and charge interest, so resort to hefty fees.

"I've seen upfront fees of \$2000 followed by \$200 fortnightly or even weekly payments," she says. "And the debtors often have no idea what they're going to end up paying over the long

term. The payment period could be up to seven years or more – there's really no restriction, and there's no guarantee the creditor will be satisfied.

"A lot of these businesses tell you to stop paying your creditors while they put the deal together, but you can't get any information about what it's going to cost until you sign up, and you have to pay a big fee to do that. You can easily end up paying more than you borrowed, interest included."

Movement overseas

In the US, where debt is high and there's an endless supply of predatory

financial practices, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) recently shut down a "robo-caller" debt-collection operation that netted \$13m by promising to dramatically reduce credit card interest rates for a \$995 fee. The scam violated an October 2010 FTC ruling against telephone-based debt consolidation companies charging upfront before doing anything about the debt. (The scammers not only didn't help reduce the debt, they also on-sold the consumers' details to other businesses.) Upfront fees for debt consolidation are still common in Australia. ■

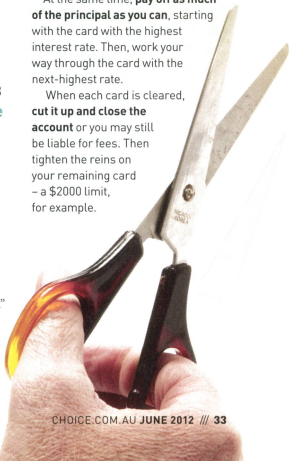
DIY debt control

A SIC offers sound guidance on how to manage multiple credit card debts, regardless of whether you apply for a hardship variance.

Stop using all but one of your credit cards, and only use that for emergencies. Make the minimum payments on all your cards to avoid multiple charges for late or missed payments.

At the same time, **pay off as much of the principal as you can**, starting with the card with the highest interest rate. Then, work your way through the card with the next-highest rate.

When each card is cleared, **cut it up and close the account** or you may still be liable for fees. Then tighten the reins on your remaining card – a \$2000 limit, for example.





The **A-Z** of education costs

The cost of putting your child through school has increased by 70% over the past 10 years, so the sooner you start saving, the better, warns **Uta Mihm**

By the time the latest addition to your family sits final school exams, their last year at a metropolitan private school could cost \$50,000. And just when you've finished paying for high school, you may have to get out your wallet for the next stage of their education – university.

Education savings plans (ESP), which offer a tax-free investment for education, sound like a good idea, but it's critical to find out what kind of leverage these have over your money. There are only two available, The Education Fund (TEF) from the Australian Scholarship Group (ASG) and Lifeplan's Education Investment Fund (LEIF). For our detailed reviews of both

plans, see opposite and page 36.

The catch with TEF is you can lose all your investment earnings if your child doesn't take up tertiary education. While an investment in LEIF is more flexible, tax advantages are lost if you don't use the earnings for education expenses.

With The Education Fund from ASG you lose all your investment earnings if your child does not take up tertiary education

and extracurricular activities) from preschool until their final year could range up to about \$60,000 for a public school, \$200,000 for an independent school and \$400,000 for a private school.

For tertiary education today, a three-year course to become an accountant will

cost about \$30,000 in total course fees. Add the costs of living for a student in shared accommodation, and this could blow out to about \$120,000. For a six-year medical



high price to pay

For a child born in 2012, education expenses (school fees

Nutshell

- It's projected that parents of children born this year will have to pay from \$60,000 for a public school up to \$400,000 for a private school education from preschool to final year.
- Education savings plans offer a tax-free investment for your child's education – but they have drawbacks.

course, course fees would be about \$62,500 and if you include living costs it could be around \$250,000.

For a student who starts university in 10 years, total costs are estimated to run up to about \$175,000 to become an accountant and about \$375,000 for a medical qualification, including accommodation and other expenses.

Budget for your savings
Saving for your child's education is similar to any other long-term savings goal. The best time to start saving

is as soon as possible, preferably when your child is born or earlier. Decide how much you can put aside each week and increase this each year to account for inflation.

There are a number of ways you can achieve your savings goal. It can be as simple as setting up a direct debit from your account and deducting a weekly amount into education savings. You could also make lump-sum contributions, such as your annual tax refund, or pay the 50% Child Care Rebate into your education savings account.

REPORT CARD

Lifeplan Education Investment Fund

Strategy The fund can be set up by parents or grandparents for a nominated student, and there is no maximum age restriction for the student. Minimum initial contribution is \$1000, and additional contributions can be made as a lump sum of at least \$500 or through a regular savings plan of a minimum of \$100 per month. Maximum contributions per child are currently \$428,000.

Pros

Tax advantages – if earnings are used for a broad range of education expenses, any tax paid is directly refunded to you.	✓
Costs covered include a wide range of full-time and part-time education, and programs for children with physical, intellectual or learning disabilities. Expenses include tuition fees, uniforms, a living allowance and accommodation expenses.	✓
Converts to an insurance bond if you decide not to use the earnings for education.	✓
You can select any one or a mix of 16 investment options from six different investment managers from cash to share investments.	✓

Cons

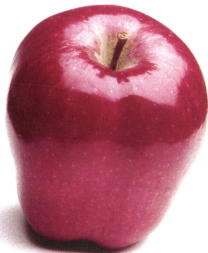
Fees such as management costs apply.	✗
No longer tax-free if you don't use the earnings for education expenses.	✗

Consider the taxman

The key factors to look at when selecting your savings strategy are performance, risk and tax rates. You'll also need to decide whether you want to save for secondary or tertiary education.

ESPs are designed for saving for tertiary education, as the earnings on investments are paid directly to the nominated child. These earnings are taxed as income for the student (income up to \$16,000 is usually tax-free for students over 18). However, high tax rates apply to children under 18 – see *CHOICE*, May 2012. So while your child is under 18 it's better to only withdraw contributions to help with education expenses, as you can do this tax-free, however it will reduce the earnings.

Earnings are taxed at the company tax rate of 30%, but if the earnings are used for a broad range of education expenses, the ATO refunds all tax paid on them to the fund. ▶





There are several other options for saving for secondary or tertiary education:

- **Paying off your mortgage** saves interest and frees up your cash flow, earning you a guaranteed tax-free return of about six to seven per cent. Use a redraw facility to access funds for education expenses.
- **Salary sacrifice into super** Take care of your retirement today and free up your cash flow when education expenses hit. Concessional tax rates apply for investing into super, but take care as you can't access the funds early.
- **Investing in insurance bonds**
If you hold the investment for 10 years, you can receive the proceeds without having to pay any extra tax as long as you follow the rules. Entry, management and other fees may apply.
- **Conventional investment options** such as an online savings account, term deposit, managed funds or shares. The main disadvantage is that earnings will be taxed at your marginal tax rate, so consider putting the investment in the name of the parent with the lowest marginal tax rate.



Zeroing in on the options

If you have a mortgage, consider paying it off first before putting money into an education fund. Salary sacrificing into super is also a good option. Both will only work if you can manage to pay education costs from your cash flow once the mortgage has been taken care of.

If you're on a high marginal tax rate, your next best option might be insurance bonds or education savings programs.

Think carefully before investing in TEF

(right), as your child will only receive the full benefit if they successfully complete an eligible full-time three-year course. ■

For the full report on all savings options, log on to choice.com.au/educationsavings

REPORT CARD

ASG The Education Fund

Strategy With TEF the earnings of the investments of all parents are pooled to benefit only the children who enter and successfully complete eligible tertiary education. Your contribution is based on the age of your nominated child when you enter TEF (maximum entry age is 10), starting from \$11 per week and increasing by 8% per year throughout the contribution period.

According to ASG projections you could receive up to \$9289, which you could use for secondary education – your total contributions after fees. If your child becomes eligible for the tertiary education benefit, assuming returns of 7% per year they could receive an additional \$10,538. ASG also offers two other plans, one of which can only be taken in conjunction with TEF. Taking up one or both of these plans could increase your investment.

Pros

Provides a tax-effective option to save for education.	✓
--	---



Cons

Any investment earnings and tax refunds are transferred into the scholarship pool.	✗
--	---



Only your contributions after fees are refundable should you decide not to continue with the investment (there can be deductions if the return of the investment was negative).	✗
---	---



Very restrictive conditions on access to the earnings and tax refunds of your investment. To get the maximum benefit, your child must study full-time for three years and satisfactorily complete each year of study. If your child elects a one- or two-year course, they only receive one or two years' worth of the benefit.	✗
---	---



According to ASG, between 2009 and 2011 only about half of the children whose parents invested in TEF were beneficiaries after they started an eligible three-year tertiary course. While some children could have delayed their tertiary education, this still means a large percentage of ASG's members missed out on their investment earnings.

No choice of investment options – TEF uses an investment strategy they describe as “conservative-balanced”.	✗
---	---



Establishment and ongoing fees apply.	✗
---------------------------------------	---



The TEF benefit for secondary and tertiary education is too low to cover a substantial part of the costs.	✗
---	---



Screen test

There are plenty of online health diagnostic tools around. **Karina Bray** examines the better ones

If you're worried about your health, you'll probably see your GP about it. But what if you're not sure – maybe there's something wrong, maybe not? Or perhaps you think you're perfectly healthy but want that confirmed?

There are quite a few screening and diagnostic tests available on the internet,

and for mobile device apps. But as with all things on the net, not everything is an accurate source of information (see *CHOICE*, March 2012). We've found some that can provide a good starting point for any health concerns you have, or just for checking everything's OK.

Body fat

📄 fitness.bizcalcs.com/Calculator.asp?Calc=Body-Fat-Navy

Assesses approximate percentage of body fat relative to overall weight.

You need waist, hip (women only) and neck circumference (cm), weight (kg) and height (cm).

BMI (see page 39) is a starting point for identifying potential excess weight, but doesn't distinguish between fat and muscle mass. This means a person with a lot of muscle may be heavier than someone of a similar size but with higher levels of fat, and fall in the "overweight" range. And older people, who tend to lose muscle tissue and gain fat as they age, may be in the "healthy" range even though they have too high levels of body fat.

The formula used by this calculator is considered accurate to within one to three per cent for most people. We tried it out on three staff members who also underwent bioelectrical impedance analysis, and found the results very similar.

Disease risk

📄 www.yourdiseaserisk.wustl.edu/

Assesses risks of 12 different types of cancer, diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis and stroke.

You need your weight and height measurements for most tests.

Desirable Cholesterol (total and HDL) in mg/dL (most countries, including Australia, use mmol per litre, but you can convert to mg/dL by dividing the number given in mmol/L by 0.0259).

Developed by the Harvard Center for Cancer Prevention, Your Disease Risk not only shows your risk of various lifestyle-related conditions relative to others of your age and gender, but also demonstrates key changes you can make to reduce risk and pats you on the back for what you're doing right. ▶

Which exercise is best for you?

lifestylemedicine.com.au/the-exerselector-questionnaire

If you're having trouble getting enthusiastic about doing your 30 minutes of exercise each day, maybe you need to try something new. The Exerselector questionnaire will suggest three types of exercise you might enjoy based on your answers.

Depression and anxiety

beyondblue.org.au

Assesses symptoms associated with various forms of anxiety and depression. About 20% of adults are estimated to be affected by some form of mental disorder every year, including anxiety disorders (which affect around 14% of the adult population) and depression (about six per cent).

Beyondblue is a joint state and federal government initiative working to address issues associated with depression, anxiety and related disorders in Australia. The Beyondblue website provides checklists of symptoms for anxiety (including generalised anxiety disorder, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder and phobias), depression, postnatal depression and bipolar disorder under the Symptoms Checklists tab. It's not a diagnostic tool, but if you answer "yes" to certain questions, they suggest you see your doctor about it.

Alcohol consumption patterns

beatalcohol.com.au/AlcoholForMe.html

Assesses problem drinking.

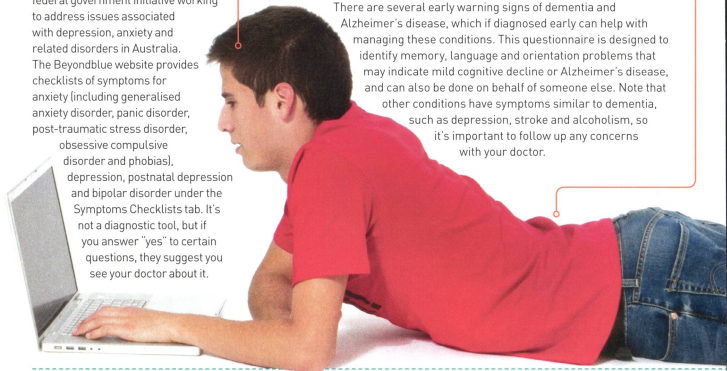
A recent survey found most Australians overestimated the number of drinks considered low-risk for short- and long-term harms, which may lead to risky drinking. You can use this questionnaire to identify problem drinking and seek help if necessary.

Memory loss

alzheimersweekly.com/content/take-21-question-alzheimers-test

Assesses symptoms of Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia, as opposed to normal age-related memory loss.

There are several early warning signs of dementia and Alzheimer's disease, which if diagnosed early can help with managing these conditions. This questionnaire is designed to identify memory, language and orientation problems that may indicate mild cognitive decline or Alzheimer's disease, and can also be done on behalf of someone else. Note that other conditions have symptoms similar to dementia, such as depression, stroke and alcoholism, so it's important to follow up any concerns with your doctor.



Diagnostic and screening apps

Like the online questionnaires and checklists above, these apps don't replace a real medical consultation but could be a bit of fun and may indicate a problem that needs further checking or raise questions for you to discuss with your doctor.

MY HEALTH CHECKLIST 2012

Proven Health Ways Inc
(iOS - \$2.99)

Written by doctors, My Health Checklist provides lists of recommended screening and preventative health measures (such as vaccinations) based on your age and gender, with special population groups also represented. Talk to your GP about any suggestions provided.



VISION TEST

3 Sided Cube (iOS, Android - free)

You should have an eye exam every year or two, especially if you're over 40. And if you're having problems with your eyesight, it's definitely time to visit your optometrist. This short eye test may pick up things you were otherwise unaware of, such as astigmatism, as well as testing your colour vision and visual acuity.



SIEMENS HEARING TEST

Siemens (iOS - free)

People suffering from hearing loss find it difficult to distinguish words when in noisy environments. This hearing test app plays nonsense words against background noise, and you have to choose the word you heard from a list provided. While other hearing tests depend on volume, with this one the volume doesn't matter.



Waist-to-height ratio

health-calc.com/body-composition/waist-to-height-ratio

You need waist circumference (cm – see below right) and height (cm).

Beer guts and love handles are a sign of excess abdominal fat. There are two main types of fat: subcutaneous, which is the layer fat below the skin and feels soft and squishy; and visceral, which is fat found deeper in the abdomen, below the abdominal muscles and padding our abdominal organs (which is why some beer guts feel hard when prodded). Visceral fat is the more dangerous of the two because it affects metabolic and hormonal processes, and can increase the risk of diabetes and heart disease, as well as breast cancer for women.

Waist circumference is often used as a guide to increased risk of chronic diseases, but this calculator takes your height into consideration for a slightly better risk estimate, especially for people who are a lot taller or shorter than average.

Diabetes risk

ausdrisk.com

Assesses your risk of developing type 2 diabetes within the next five years.

You need waist circumference (cm).

Caught in the early stages, the effects of type 2 diabetes on your cardiovascular system can be reduced or even prevented with appropriate management – diet, lifestyle and medication. But many people aren't diagnosed until the disease has taken hold. This assessment tool can estimate your risk based on demographics, waist measurements and lifestyle. Should it determine you're at high risk of type 2 diabetes, see your doctor for follow-up tests sooner rather than later.

Body mass index (BMI)

betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcsite.nsf/pages/bmi

Assesses: weight in proportion to height

You need: weight (kg) and height (cm)

BMI indicates whether your weight is in the healthy range for your height. It's often used to assess risk for certain diseases.

Life expectancy

exrx.net/Calculators/HealthAge.html

Assesses: approximate life expectancy.

You need: blood pressure, cholesterol (convert from mmol/L to mg/dL by dividing the number given in mmol/L by 0.0259) and waist and hip measurements to determine waist:hip ratio.

Are you blessed with genes for good health and longevity? Is your lifestyle helping or hindering your chances of getting that 100th birthday telegram from the Queen (or king, or president, as the case may be)? There are quite a few life expectancy calculators online, some more comprehensive than others. But any that take lifestyle into account, rather than simple demographics, give fairly similar results. This one is good because it's all on one page and you can tweak the answers to instantly see what difference it makes. ■

BLOOD PRESSURE MONITOR CUFF & APP

iHealth and Withings (iOS – \$100+)

There are quite a few free apps that can be used to track your blood pressure, as measured from your personal blood pressure monitor. But two companies provide a hardware blood pressure cuff that attaches to your iPhone or iPad and measures your blood pressure too. They're worth considering if you need to monitor blood pressure at home and don't already have a monitor. And shop around online – they cost less overseas.



12 MINUTE RUN – COOPERS TEST

Jarrold Robinson (iOS, \$0.99)

The Coopers test is an easy way to test your fitness: simply run as far as you can for 12 minutes, and look up the distance run on charts that predict your fitness level according to age and gender. The problem is accurately measuring the distance run – not so easy unless you've got access to a standard athletic track. But this app uses your phone's GPS to track how far you've run while simultaneously timing you, allowing you to keep records to measure progress.



Measure your waist

Many diseases are linked with excess abdominal fat, which can be indicated by your waist circumference. But where exactly is your waist? For those blessed with an hourglass figure, finding it is straightforward. Otherwise, it's above the hip bone, about level with the navel. Another way to work it out is to bend sideways – the crease that's formed at the bend is where your waist is. Make sure the measuring tape is level and firm against the skin, but not digging into it, and don't hold your breath.

Ask the Experts

Got a niggling question our team can help with?

The Lifetime Health Cover penalty, where two per cent is added to your premium for every year you don't have hospital insurance after age 31, has me and my wife confused. We had hospital insurance both before, and some 19 years after I passed the age of 31, and then opted out for about 15 years before again taking up hospital insurance in 2006. At that time we were plagued with a penalty loading for the whole period after age 31 up to 2006 – 34 years, which is 68%. On questioning this penalty we were told our earlier period of cover did not count, but surely we should only be penalised for the 15-year period when we weren't covered?

CHOICE insurance guru Uta Mihm replies: Unfortunately, only the time you held hospital cover after the introduction of Lifetime Health Cover on 1 July 2000 counts. Since LHC did not exist at the time you held hospital cover, the exemption doesn't apply to you. The penalty loading will apply for 10 years in total, after which time your premiums will revert to the base rate.

For more information, go to health.gov.au and follow the links to private health insurance and then LHC, or call the LHC Hotline on 1800 307 446 (freecall anywhere in Australia).



Uta Mihm

Why don't generic medicines have all their ingredients listed on the box, not just the active ingredients? I had a reaction to something in

a generic paracetamol, presumably due to the inactive ingredients. I had to do my own searching on the net to find out what they were.

Karina Bray



CHOICE health expert Karina Bray replies: All medicines have a Consumer Medicines Information (CMI) leaflet, available from a doctor, pharmacist or other dispenser, or you can call the Medicines Line on 1300 633 424. The CMI leaflet lists the active and inactive ingredients, so if you have known allergies or intolerances, check the leaflet before trying something new. You can ask for it when you buy medicine, though if you're buying from a supermarket you'll have to rely on your mobile phone.

The CMI also tells you what the medicine's used for, interactions with other drugs, contraindications (when you shouldn't take the medicine), common and rare side effects and what to do if you react badly to it.

We're spring cleaning and have a number of computers, printers, TVs, phones, stereos and other electrical appliances to get rid of, and we'd like to recycle or donate them rather than just putting them in landfill. Do you have any suggestions or can you refer us to a site that has this sort of information?

CHOICE journalist Zoya Sheftalovich replies: A national TV and computer-recycling scheme is being rolled out from this year – see environment.gov.au/settlements/waste/ewaste for more information.

There are lots of things you can do with your other old household goods, particularly if they're still in working order. A great place to start is givenow.com.au, which categorises community and charity groups by the types of goods each is after. Go to givenow.com.au/otherways/electricals or givenow.com.au/otherways/mobilephones and select your state to find plenty of good causes you can support with your old stuff.

Another option is to offer them to the community at large, either through freecycle.org or zilch.com.au. With these options you simply list the items you'd like to get rid of, and anyone who wants them can come by and pick them up.



Zoya Sheftalovich

Ask us

Do you have a question for one of CHOICE's experts? Email us at asktheexperts@choice.com.au or write to us at Ask the Experts, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville, NSW 2204.

Who took
to the track to test
tyres this month?
Find out on
page 57

On test

Benchtop mixers, vacuum cleaners, electric blankets and heaters – they're all here

42 Mixers & blenders

We mix things up in this special report

48 Vacuum cleaners

Pet hair isn't a problem for our recommended marvels

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Which ones take out tough stains?

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Your greenest energy-saving options

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Wet or dry, we've got them cornered

60 Wireless speakers

Take the music with you

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We bust some myths around sound

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Do you still actually need one?

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New test methods mean new results

70 Electric blankets

These are good in bed

72 Electric heaters

Which will warm up your winter?

CHOICE. The People's Watchdog

CHOICE's experienced technical staff puts products through their paces in our own testing laboratories. We use test methods based on Australian standards and develop our own to match the way consumers use a product in their homes. We buy the products we test, maintaining our independence from manufacturers and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. We've checked the models are available at the time we publish. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.



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Mix masters

Shake, mix, whip or blend – these handy appliances make cooking chores in the kitchen a breeze, says **Rebecca Gatto**

Handheld mixers

If you're looking to whisk egg cream or make cake batters, a handheld mixer is extremely useful. They're easy to use and have few accessories and are easy to store. Some even come with dough hooks, though we've found these aren't powerful enough to knead dough. (For more powerful benchtop mixers, see page 44.)

Most handheld mixers can stand upright, so if you've prepared the ingredients all you need to do is stop the mixer to add them as required. They're also easy to manoeuvre around the bowl to thoroughly combine ingredients.

We assessed how well they can whisk and mix, and our table below has results newly tested. The recommended models (right) are more expensive, but the cheaper models still get the job done well and may be a good option if you need to use one only occasionally. We also included two compact benchtop mixers that detach to become a handheld mixer – the Breville EM6 and Sunbeam Mixmaster Compact MX5900 (both very good overall).

Benchtop mixers
page 44

Handheld blenders
page 45

Nutshell

► We put eight handheld and six benchtop mixers to the test along with 10 stick and 10 handheld blenders, combining our results with models that are still available from previous tests.

HANDHELD MIXERS

- # KitchenAid Artisan Hand Mixer KHM720
- # Bodum Bistro Electric Hand Mixer
- Kenwood kMix Boutique Hand Mixer HM791
- Breville Wizz Digital Mix Hand Mixer HM791
- # Breville EM6
- # Sunbeam Mixmaster Compact MX5900
- # GVA Hand Mixer GVA 2620E
- Kambrook KHM10
- Sunbeam Beatermix Pro JM5900
- # Cuisinart HM-90BCSA 9-Speed Hand Mixer with Storage C
- Cuisinart Powerselect 5-Speed Hand Mixer CHM-5SSA
- Breville EM3
- # Sunbeam Beatermix JM3250
- Kenwood HM330 Hand Mixer
- # Abode Hand Mixer 707D

WHAT TO BUY



93% Kitchen Aid Artisan Hand Mixer KHM720

Good points

- Excellent for mixing and whisking
- Very easy to use, with touch controls with digital speed display
- Separate on/off switch
- Stands steadily on the bench
- Beaters are dishwasher-safe
- Comes with a liquid blender rod attachment and attachment storage bag

Bad points

- Relatively expensive



91% Bodum Bistro Electric Hand Mixer

Good points

- Excellent for mixing and whisking
- Easy to use, including controls
- Retractable cord that winds manually
- Stands steadily on the bench
- Comes with a whisk attachment
- Attachments are dishwasher-safe

Bad points

- None to mention

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OTHER WHAT TO BUYS

Recommended models from previous testing (CHOICE, March 2009):

91% Kenwood kMix

Boutique Hand Mixer HM791

\$139

90% Breville Wizz Digital

Mix BHM500

\$80

ABOUT THE REST

The rest are very good overall except the **Abode**. It's still good, but doesn't impress when it comes to whisking egg whites. It doesn't stand upright and has small beaters – we found it struggles mixing in deep bowls and wouldn't cope well with large quantities. Its controls are slightly stiff to operate, which we also found with the **GVA**. The **Breville EM6** and **Sunbeam Mixmaster Compact MX5900** have lots of cracks and crevices where food can accumulate. ▶



WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Lightweight A mixer that's too heavy is uncomfortable, but one that's too light offers little control.

On/off switch acts as a safety mechanism so the mixer can't be turned on accidentally if it's on a speed when plugged in.

Rubber footing on the base allows the mixer to stay stable when in standing position.

Attachments need to be a good length – shorter beaters will restrict the size of the bowl you can use. All attachments are dishwasher-safe except for the **Kambrook KHM10's**.

Pulse function allows you to remove excess mixture from the beaters, whereas **boost/turbo** provides a quick burst of power.

Controls should be easy to access, and speed settings should be smooth to change.

A range of speed settings – low for combining ingredients and high for whisking.

PERFORMANCE		FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS		
Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Whisking (%)	Beating (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Whisk	Dough hooks	Pulse	Boost/turbo	Speed control
93	100	100	100	83				7	19 x 8 x 14
91	100	100	100	77	✓	✓		5	21 x 9 x 17
91	100	100	100	78		✓	✓	5	20 x 8 x 15
90	100	100	100	75			✓	16	19 x 10 x 15
89	100	100	100	73		✓	✓	5	35 x 21 x 30 (A)
89	100	100	100	73		✓	✓	10	31 x 24 x 34 (A)
88	100	100	100	70		✓	✓	5	20 x 9 x 14
88	100	100	100	70		✓	✓	5	20 x 9 x 16
88	100	100	100	70		✓	✓	10	19 x 9 x 17
87	90	80	100	83	✓	✓	✓	9	20 x 8 x 16
86	95	100	90	73	✓	✓	✓	5	21 x 9 x 14
83	88	75	100	75		✓	✓	5	21 x 9 x 15
83	85	70	100	80			✓	5	20 x 9 x 15
81	90	100	80	68		✓	✓	6	21 x 9 x 15
73	80	60	100	63				5	13 x 7 x 17

USING THE

TABLE Scores

The overall score is made up of:

performance (60%) and ease of use (40%).

Features See

What to Look For, right.

Price

Recommended retail, as of May

2012. **TABLE**

NOTES # Newly

tested models.

* Measurements

taken standing.

** Weight is

calculated with

the beaters.

(A) Dimensions

of the compact

benchtop mixer

were taken.

(B) Includes

storage

container.

P Plastic.

M Metal.

Benchtop mixers

If you regularly make doughs and other heavy batters then you'll find you need something with more grunt than a handheld mixer. A benchtop mixer is fast, easy to use and worth your while if you're an avid baker. We tested six mixers with single tool attachment priced from \$330-999. We haven't included mixers with twin tools here as they struggle when mixing and kneading heavier batters, even though they generally whisk and mix well.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Stainless steel bowls are extremely durable; glass or plastic ones may be hard to replace if you break them.

Splash guard prevents ingredients from spilling out of the bowl while

All the newly tested models perform excellently across all tests. A new feature they all have is a scraper beater that has a rubber scraper incorporated around its rim, allowing all ingredients to be thoroughly mixed.

If you have recipes that specify the length of time ingredients should be mixed, the Breville The Scraper Mixer Pro BEM800 and Sunbeam Café Series Mixmaster MX9200 both have a useful count up and down timer.

mixing. Some guards include a chute for adding ingredients directly to the bowl.

A heavy duty beater is likely to be the most frequently used tool for cakes and savoury dishes.

Range of speed settings for kneading dough, mixing cakes and whipping egg whites. Six speeds should be enough.

Bowl lock keeps the bowl stable during mixing.

Spring loaded tilt-head allows for an easy and smooth lift.

Single dough hook can handle the task of mixing and kneading dough.

WHAT TO BUY

All newly tested models are recommended – they're all excellent performers. All are easy to use except the **KitchenAid KSM156**, which is only OK. Its control lever is stiff to operate and the motor head is very heavy and not spring-loaded – you'll need to hold the motor head when lifting and lowering. It doesn't have a pouring shield (neither does the **Breville The Scraper Mixer BEM410**), so you'll need to reduce the speed when adding ingredients as they can splash out. When kneading dough all the mixers can jolt a bit.

86% Kenwood Titanium Major KM020, \$999



BENCHTOP MIXERS

# Breville The Scraper Mixer Pro BEM800	550	89
Kenwood KMX51 – kMix Stand Mixer	699	89
# Kenwood Classic Chef KM330	449	88
# Breville The Scraper Mixer BEM410	330	87
KitchenAid 5KSM150PS Artisan Mixer	749	87
# KitchenAid Platinum Collection Stand Mixer KSM156	799	87
# Kenwood Titanium Major KM020	999	86
# Sunbeam Café Series Mixmaster MX9200	499	85
Kenwood KM270 Patisserie	429	84

	PERFORMANCE						FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS							
	Price (\$)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)			Whisking (%)	Beating (%)	Dough hook (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Whisk	Pouring shield / splash guard	Speed control	Pulse option	Dishwasher-safe	Mixer construction	Bowl type	Dimensions (cm. H x W x D)*	Weight (kg)**	Bowl capacity (L)
550	89		97	90	100	100	78	✓	✓/✓	4		✓ (A)	✓	M	SS	36 x 40 x 26	7.4	4.7	
699	89		97	100	90	100	77	✓	✓/✓	8		✓ (A)	✓	M	SS	36 x 40 x 26	8.5	ns	
449	88		97	90	100	100	75	✓	✓/✓	8	✓	✓ (A)	✓	P	P	31 x 36 x 27	6.1	ns	
330	87		97	90	100	100	73	✓	✓/✓	6		✓ (A)	✓	M	SS	35 x 35 x 26	7.2	4.7	
749	87		100	100	100	100	68	✓	✓/✓	10		✓ (B)	✓	M	SS	35 x 34 x 25	10.5	4.8	
799	87		100	100	100	100	67	✓	✓/✓	10		✓ (B)	✓	M	G	36 x 35 x 30	11.3	4.8	
999	86		97	100	90	100	70	✓	✓/✓	8	✓	✓ (A)	✓	M	SS	35 x 39 x 29	9.3	ns	
499	85		93	90	90	100	72	✓	✓/✓	12		✓	✓	M	SS	36 x 37 x 22	8.0	4.5	
429	84		92	75	100	100	73	✓	✓/✓	12		✓ (A)	✓	M, P	SS	37 x 39 x 25	7.6	4.0	

USING THE TABLE SCORES The overall score is made up of performance (60%) and ease of use (40%). **Features** See What to Look For, above. **Price** Recommended retail, as of May 2012. **TABLE NOTES** # Newly tested models. * The mixer was positioned with the controls as the front of the bench – that is, the width is the length of the mixer from side to side. The depth includes the bowl. ** Includes cord, bowl and beaters. ns Not stated. (A) Bowl and attachments. (B) Bowl and all attachments except for whisk. M Metal. P Plastic. SS Stainless steel. G Glass.

87% Breville The Scraper
Mixer BEM410, \$330



Best
Buy

87% KitchenAid
Platinum
Collection Stand Mixer
KSM156, \$799



89% Breville The Scraper
Mixer Pro BEM800, \$550



88% Kenwood
Classic Chef
KM330, \$449



85%
Sunbeam Café
Series
Mixmaster
MX9200, \$499



Handheld blenders

A handheld blender is useful for making soups and preparing baby food. And if you make pastes or chop or grind small amounts of food, then a blender with a processing attachment is even better. You don't have to spend big on a blender – even the cheapest will get the job done if you're only blending baby food.

We tested 10 new blenders in two categories – those that can only blend and emulsify soft foods and those that also come with a chopper/processor attachment and can chop, grind and process hard foods. In the past we've found all models to be excellent at blending, so we didn't test for that this time around. See page 46 for our recommended models.

Five models are only able to blend soft foods, so for those we assessed their ease of use (see About the Rest, page 46). For the others that come with processor attachments, we subjected them to chopping and processing tests (see the table, below).

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Comfortable grip that's easy to hold with a soft non-slip grip.

Sealed controls will make it less likely for food to get into any crevices. The **cord** shouldn't get in the way of your hand when holding the blender.

Grinder/chopper/processor This is a separate unit that's useful for processing small quantities of ingredients such as nuts, bread, coffee, herbs, spices and raw vegetables.

Whipper/beater is an attachment specifically for whipping cream and beating egg whites.

Jug/beaker is useful for pureeing or blending.



HANDHELD BLENDERS

Breville The Control Grip BS8510

Price (\$)

Overall score (%)

120

86

Braun MultiQuick 5 Hand Blender MR530 Sauce

149

85

Sunbeam StickMaster Plus SM6400

70

84

Kenwood kMix Triblade Hand Blender HB891

199

83

Kenwood Hand Blender HB520

40

75

Cuisinart CSB-77A Stainless Stick Blender

119

74

Sunbeam Stickmaster Pro SM8650

100

73

Kambrook Essentials Stick Mixer KSB7

45

71

USING THE TABLE SCORES The overall score is made up of ease of use (50%) and performance (50%). **Price** Recommended retail, as of May 2012. **TABLE NOTES** # Newly tested models. All blenders in this table have a chopper attachment. **na** Not applicable.

PERFORMANCE

	PERFORMANCE				FEATURES		SPECIFICATIONS
	Performance score (%)	Chopping (%)	Processing (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Whisk attachment	Dishwasher-safe	Jug capacity (mL)
# Breville The Control Grip BS8510	95	100	90	78	✓	✓	1.0
# Braun MultiQuick 5 Hand Blender MR530 Sauce	95	100	90	75	✓	✓	0.81
# Sunbeam StickMaster Plus SM6400	100	100	100	68	✓	✓	0.8
# Kenwood kMix Triblade Hand Blender HB891	90	100	80	75	✓		1.1
# Kenwood Hand Blender HB520	75	100	50	75		✓	0.83
# Cuisinart CSB-77A Stainless Stick Blender	80	80	80	68	✓		0.82
# Sunbeam Stickmaster Pro SM8650	75	75	75	70	✓	✓	0.97
# Kambrook Essentials Stick Mixer KSB7	85	100	70	58		✓	0.81



WHAT TO BUY

86%

Breville The Control Grip BSB510, \$120

Good points

- Excellent results when using the processor
- Metal shaft can be removed for easy cleaning
- Sealed rubber control
- Medium-size processor with non-slip base that can be used as a lid for processor
- Large beaker with lid and grading

Bad points

- Blade cannot be removed from shaft, and shaft release requires pressure



85%

Braun MultiQuick 5 Hand Blender MR530 Sauce, \$149

Good points

- Excellent results when using the processor
- Metal shaft can be removed for easy cleaning
- Sealed rubber control
- Medium-size processor with non-slip base that can be used as a lid for processor



Bad points

- Blade can't be removed from shaft and is difficult to remove from chopper attachment
- Shaft release requires pressure

ABOUT THE REST

The **Cuisinart** has a comfortable grip and is easy to assemble, disassemble and clean. The **Kambrook** is only borderline for ease of use – it has an uncomfortable grip and the controls require pressure to use.

We assessed the ease of use of the **Bamix Mono** (\$177), **Bodum Bistro Stick Blender** (\$72), **KitchenAid Artisan Hand Blender KHB100** (\$130), **Kenwood Hand Blender HB714** (\$99) and **Breville The Control Grip BSB310** (\$60) – models suitable for soft foods only.

They're all easy to use except the Breville, which is only OK – its controls require slight pressure to operate and its plastic shaft can discolour. The Bamix, Bodum and KitchenAid are all comfortable to grip. The blade of the Bamix can also chop and does this well – you can also buy processing attachments as optional extras. The control position on the Kenwood makes for an uncomfortable grip.

Benchtop blenders

If you enjoy making cocktails, crushing ice or creating smoothies, you'll get great use out of a benchtop blender. We assessed 10 models priced between \$20 and \$379 for how well they can crush ice, chop carrots and blend soup. Generally, the most expensive ones get the job done best – most of the models under \$100 rate at the bottom of our table (see below right).

If you're after a benchtop blender, make sure the jug is stable – we noticed a few that were unstable and could be knocked over quite easily. And when it comes to cleaning, one with removable blades will help.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Sealed controls means food can't get into any crevices.

Lightweight jug Some can be heavy to lift and move when full.

Maximum and minimum grading of liquid is a useful guide – jug capacities range from 1.5-1.75L.

Easy-to-remove lid The suction on some lids makes them tricky to remove.

Good size chute allows you to add ingredients while the blender is on.

Removable blade housing makes cleaning easier.

83%

Kenwood kMix Triblade Hand Blender HB891, \$199

Good points

- Excellent results when using the processor
- Large processor with a feed chute and non-slip base comes with a shredder, grater and slicing disc
- Soup blender attachment (wider base/blade) reduces splashing with quicker results
- Storage covers for both blade shafts

Bad points

- Metal guards may damage bowls, beakers and saucepans
- Requires a little pressure to release shaft



Contacts

Abode	bigw.com.au
Bamix	bamix.com.au
Bodum	kitchenware.direct.com.au
Braun	braun.com
Breville	breville.com.au
Cuisinart	cuisinart.com.au
GVA	thegoodguys.com.au
Kambrook	kambrook.com.au
Kenwood	kenwood-australia.com
KitchenAid	petermcinnies.com.au
Sunbeam	sunbeam.com.au

WHAT TO BUY

The recommended models are all excellent for performance. The **KitchenAid 5-Speed Blender 5KSB650AEB1** tops the group – its controls are easy to use and its plastic jug is light, but it's large and may be awkward to clean. At less than half the price of the KitchenAid, the **Breville ikon 550 Blender BBL550** is just as good – its blade housing is removable but the glass jug is quite heavy, especially with a load. The **Cuisinart** is a bit different – it not only chops and blends, but an

integrated heating element means it can brown, boil and simmer as well. Its jug is very heavy and the lid can be difficult to remove, so take care. The **Kenwood BL460** has a lightweight plastic jug and its blade housing is removable. The **Sunbeam Multi Blender Electronic PB7950** has easy-to-use controls and removable blades but its glass jug is heavy and can be fiddly to clean. We also found the glass jug to be heavy and uncomfortable to hold for the **Kenwood kMix Blender BLX51**.

ABOUT THE REST

The rest buckled when crushing ice and chopping carrots. The **Abode** in particular is very poor for both tasks. The **Sunbeam Multiblender Pro PB7600** is very good for chopping carrots, but the **Kambrook** is only borderline and the **Breville Power Blender BLR50** rates very poorly for this task. The **Abode** is also unstable and the whole unit can be knocked over easily, while the **Breville** jug can be easily knocked off the motor unit as it doesn't lock into position. The **Sunbeam** jug is also unstable. ■



91% KitchenAid
5-Speed
Blender 5KSB650AEB1, \$379



89% Breville
ikon 550
blender BBL550, \$180



88% Cuisinart
SSB-1A Hot
and Cold Blender, \$299



87% Kenwood
BL460, \$66



87% Sunbeam
Multi Blender
Electronic PB7950, \$139

86% Kenwood
kMix
Blender BLX51, \$219



		Performance							Features		Specifications							
BENCHTOP BLENDERS	Price (\$)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)		Blending (%)		Crushing ice (%)	Chopping (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Cord storage	Jug lock	Removable blade housing	Blender construction	Bowl type (plastic, glass)	Number of speeds	Dimensions (cm. H x W x D)	Weight of blender (kg)	Jug weight (kg)
	KitchenAid 5-Speed Blender 5KSB650AEB1	379	91	97	100	100	90	83					M	P	5	45 x 18 x 24	5.3	1.0
	Breville ikon 550 Blender BBL550	180	89	100	100	100	100	73			✓		M	G	5	43 x 16 x 21	5.1	2.2
	Cuisinart SSB-1A Hot and Cold Blender	299	88	100	100	100	100	70					P	P	3	45 x 22 x 21	4.7	2.3
	Kenwood BL460 True Blender	66	87	93	100	100	80	77	✓	✓	✓		P	P	3	41 x 17 x 18	1.8	0.5
	Sunbeam Multi Blender Electronic PB7950	139	87	97	100	100	90	73	✓		✓		M	G	2 (A)	42 x 21 x 16	4.2	2.2
	Kenwood kMix Blender BLX51	219	86	97	100	100	90	70	✓	✓	✓		P	G	3	40 x 18 x 21	4.8	2.1
	Sunbeam Multiblender Pro PB7600	65	73	77	100	50	80	67	✓				P	G	3	44 x 17 x 21	3.4	1.8
	Kambrook Power Drive Blender KBL110	50	66	63	90	50	50	70					P	G	2	40 x 15 x 15	2.9	1.4
	Breville Power Blender BLR50	80	61	57	100	50	20	67	✓				P	G	5	43 x 16 x 23	3.5	1.8
Abode Glass Blender (XJ-10402) B0	20	51	43	100	20	10	63		✓			P	G	2	39 x 21 x 18	2.9	1.9	

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of performance (60%) and ease of use (40%). **Features** See What to Look For, opposite. **Price** Recommended retail, as of May 2012.

TABLE NOTES M Metal; P Plastic; G Glass; (A) Plus recipe programmed buttons.



Nutshell

- Twelve newly tested vacuums – ranging in price from \$300 to \$599.
- Overall, pet hair removal performance continues to improve for mid-priced vacs.

The price is right

Keeping your home clean doesn't have to cost a lot even if you share it with furry friends, says **Denis Gallagher**

Over years of testing we've come to the conclusion that vacs priced between \$300 and \$600 provide the best combination of value and performance. This most recent test is no different, with some very good mid-priced options available. So once you've decided on your short list based on key performance areas such as dirt pick-up and ease of use, you may need to consider other aspects to narrow it down.

Once you've determined whether you're a bag or bin fan (we've found both designs can deliver the goods for cleaning performance), other areas to look at may include whether the vac has variable suction control, allowing you to lower the power for cleaning curtains. As few people enjoy the sound of these, you might want to look for a quieter model, with noise levels for models in this test ranging from 64dB up to 82dB.

PET-FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE

Over the past couple of tests, our tester, Peter Horvath, has noticed improvements in non-power heads for vacs in the mid-price range, with several models scoring perfect marks for pet hair removal using a turbo brush. While excellent pet hair removal scores are common among cleaner models using

a power head, the standard option for mid-priced vacuum cleaners is a non-powered turbo head, using a rotating brush driven by airflow. A power head uses an inbuilt motor to help remove those stubborn strands of hair that fall off your favourite moggy or pooch and get into your carpet, but improved turbo head design appears to be closing the gap between powered and non-powered heads.

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COSTS

	Price (\$)	Annual running cost (\$)
# Electrolux Ultra Active ZUA3831PT	499	19.10
# Miele Cat & Dog G600 S5320	499	20.00
Miele S5311	529	20.46
# LG Kompressor VK9820UH	549	17.50
# Vax Zen 2 Pet VCZP1600	379	16.70
Electrolux JetMaxx JYM6840	299	20.46
Miele S5211	429	20.57
# Bosch Roxx Sensor Bagless BGS6220AU	599	20.40
Nilfisk Power Allergy P40 9059908010	399	15.62
Nilfisk Power Special 107403537	379	15.70
# Samsung Twin Chamber Super SC8820	399	19.10
# Electrolux Ultra Silencer ZUS3950P	399	15.30
# Hoover Prestige 7010	449	12.90
Nilfisk Extreme Eco 9061003010	499	14.41
# Philips Easy Clean FC8734	300	15.90
Vax Power Plus 3 All Terrain VPPAT1600	349	16.28
# Bosch GL-40 Automatic BSL4223AU	399	20.90
# Rowenta Silence Force Cyclonic R0806583	460	20.50
# Bissell Pet Hair Eraser Multi Cyclonic 10N6-F	309	15.20

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Adjustable head height allows you to adjust the height of the bristles on the cleaning head to the length of the carpet pile or for when you're vacuuming hard surfaces.

The standard tools to check for are **dusting, crevice and upholstery brushes**. All models have on-board storage, which can be convenient, although the Philips can only store two tools and the Rowenta one tool.

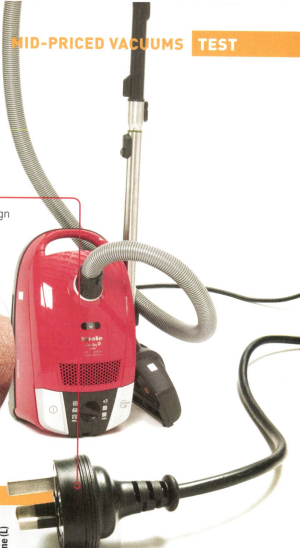
Variable power/suction allows you to lower the suction for delicate jobs, such as cleaning curtains. Some models have a remote control to carry out these actions.

A **telescopic wand** lets you adjust the wand to suit your height so you don't have to bend too much.

A **high-efficiency particulate air filter** (HEPA filter) adheres to an international

standard for filters that trap particles, and can help if you have asthma or a dust allergy or sensitivity. All models on test except the Miele have one.

A **long cord** so you're not changing power points and a neat compact design for easy storage are also desirable. ▶



PERFORMANCE

FEATURES

SPECIFICATIONS

Dirt removal from carpet score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Cleaning corners and edges score (%)	Pet hair removal score (%)	Carpet head floor head / power head / turbo brush / hard floor tool	Crevice tool / upholstery tool / dusting brush	Variable suction control	Variable power	Power (W, measured)	Dust collector	Reach from power point (m)	Noise (dB)	Weight (kg)	Measured dust collector volume (L)	Contact
77	81	75	100	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1670	Bin	12.0	73	8.0	1.8	electrolux.com.au
74	79	85	100	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1750	Bag	9.6	70	6.5	2.4	miele.com.au
77	82	80	90	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1790	Bag	9.8	71	8.2	3.0	miele.com.au
73	77	86	100	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1530	Bin	12.2	75	8.9	2.0	lge.com.au
72	81	80	100	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1460	Bin	11.3	70	8.1	2.2	vax.com.au
74	73	68	100	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1790	Bag	8.8	74	7.0	2.9	electrolux.com.au
77	81	76	70	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1800	Bag	9.8	68	7.9	3.0	miele.com.au
75	68	69	100	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1780	Bin	10.4	70	10.1	1.6	bosch.com.au
61	82	81	100	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1370	Bag	11.4	68	8.7	1.8	consumer.nifisk.com.au
64	78	81	100	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1370	Bag	11.6	70	8.6	1.8	consumer.nifisk.com.au
62	86	70	100	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1670	Bin	10.0	75	7.2	2.0	samsung.com.au
73	79	71	70	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1340	Bag	12.0	65	7.8	2.1	electrolux.com.au
65	84	75	70	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1130	Bin	10.0	66	7.0	1.2	hooverfloorcare.com.au
75	80	78	50	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1260	Bag	10.4	64	9.6	2.5	consumer.nifisk.com.au
66	83	85	50	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1390	Bin	10.2	70	7.7	1.5	philips.com.au
57	78	78	90	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1420	Bin	13.0	70	9.3	1.3	vax.com.au
63	78	70	70	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1830	Bag	10.0	73	6.4	1.9	bosch.com.au
51	73	74	90	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1790	Bin	9.0	69	9.3	1.4	rowenta.com.au
60	58	54	100	✓/✓/✓/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	1330	Bin	9.6	82	8.5	2.4	bissell.com.au

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of dirt removal from carpet (40%), ease of use (30%), cleaning corners and edges (15%), and pet hair removal (15%). All models score 100% in our scratch test.

Noise For comparison, a typical conversation is carried out at about 60dB, while city traffic is measured at around 80dB.

Features See What to Look For, above.

Annual running costs are based on one hour's use per week at 22c/kWh.

Price Recommended retail, as of May 2012.

TABLE NOTES

* Approximate. Usually available in packs of three or more. **na** Not applicable.

Newly tested models.

All models on test have on-board storage. All are barrel vacs except the Bissell (an upright). All have a HEPA filter except the Miele models.

WHAT TO BUY

81%

Electrolux Ultra Active
ZUA3831PT, \$499

Good points

- Good at picking up dirt from carpet, and at cleaning corners and along edges
- Excellent at picking up pet hair
- Variable power
- Washable HEPA filter
- Very long power cord
- Very good, long wand

Bad points

- The bin is messy to clean



81%

Miele Cat & Dog
6000 S6320, \$499

Good points

- Good at picking up dirt from carpet
- Very good at cleaning corners and along edges
- Excellent at picking up pet hair
- Variable power
- Very good, long wand
- Excellent bag is easy to remove/replace

Bad points

- None to mention



80%

LG Kompressor
VK9820UH, \$549

Good points

- Good at picking up dirt from carpet
- Very good at cleaning corners and along edges
- Excellent at picking up pet hair
- Variable power
- HEPA filter
- Excellent reach from the power point
- Very good, long wand
- Excellent controls are located at the fingertip

Bad points

- The bin is messy to clean



80%

Vax Zen 2 Pet
VCZP1600, \$379

Good points

- Good at picking up dirt from carpet
- Very good at cleaning corners and along edges
- Excellent at picking up pet hair
- HEPA filter
- Very long power cord
- Very good, long wand

Bad points

- The bin is messy to clean



OTHER WHAT TO BUYS (previously tested)

91%

Miele S5311, \$529 (CHOICE, May 2011)

ABOUT THE REST

Among the newly tested models, the **Bosch Roxx's Sensor Bagless** delivers for dirt and pet hair pick-up, although ease of use and getting into corners aren't as effective as for the top-performing models.

While the **Nilfisks, Samsung, Philips,**

Hoover, Vax and Bosch GL-40 all earn good overall scores, we can't recommend them as they don't perform as well as the others for dirt removal on carpet. They're worth considering if you have hard floors.

The **Bissell Pet Hair Eraser Multi Cyclonic 10N6-F** is the only upright vac on

test, and as with most vacs of this type doesn't perform well when dealing with corners due to its large power head. It's also the loudest on test. ■

To find out how we test vacuums, go to choice.com.au/midpricedvac



Out, damned spot!

Matthew Steen explains how we've improved our detergent testing in response to your feedback

CHOICE's previous test of laundry detergents found powders are better than liquids for stain removal. However, we only tested for a limited number of stains. Here, we expand our stain set to include five extra stains. We chose these stains based on your feedback in our product use survey and, because of this, the results of both tests can't be directly compared.

As well as a test for general detergency, the stains we use to score performance include grass, clay, motor oil, natural oils (sebum), rice starch and vegetable oil – see How We Test (page 52) for more details. While some detergents still have difficulty with certain stains, our recommended detergents (right) really shine through.

You'll notice the top-loader detergent scores are generally lower than front-loader ones. We've seen a similar performance drop in our washer tests (see CHOICE, May 2012). We've also included scores for stain removal without any kind of laundry detergent at all, which shows just how much – or how little – difference detergents can make. ▶

Nutshell

- ▶ Inexpensive powder can still give you a good wash, depending on the stain.
- ▶ Our tables (page 52) show which detergents work best in cold water – and for which stains and machine type.

WHAT TO BUY

Our recommended powders for front loaders have an overall score of at least 70%, and those for top loaders at least 60% overall.

FRONT LOADER Cost per wash

75% Omo Ultimate	
Front Loader	79c
74% Omo Small & Mighty	
Alpine Fresh Front Loader	47c
70% Trimat (Aldi)	
Front Loader Concentrated Laundry Powder	31c

Best Buy

TOP LOADER Cost per wash

64% Omo Ultimate	
Top Loader	85c
61% Cussons Radiant	
Advanced Top Loader	50c

\$333.5m

Market value of laundry powders 2011-12

66.8%

Top loader powders market share

33.2%

Front loader powders market share

LUKEWARM REACTION

Once we had results for the highest- and lowest-performing detergents, we retested them in both top- and front-loader variants to see whether a warm wash would mean a big difference in results.

Generally there is an overall benefit, but only by a couple of per cent. However, one top loader powder comes out marginally worse when washing with warm water. To find out whether it's worth using warm water, look at the results in our tables (right), as it really depends on which stains you're trying to remove. Some detergents perform better in cold water than warm with some stains.

HOW WE TEST

Dirt removal score Our testers measure out the recommended detergent dose for a soiled load (or a lightly soiled one if a normal recommendation is not given), and use it to wash specially soiled swatches attached to laundry items in cold water (20°).

Soils Swatches used to measure general detergency are stained with nut oil, milk and a colour pigment. We also include swatches with common stains our members need to remove, according to

our product use survey: clay (particulate removal), sebum (natural oils found on human skin, collar and cuff stains), rice starch (amylase sensitive enzyme), vegetable oil (cooking oil), grass (which tests detergents for their action on general stain removal and enzymes that target proteins) and motor oil (mineral oil removal).

Using a spectrophotometer, which measures how much light reflects off the swatches after filtering out any effects of optical brighteners, our testers measure how much dirt is removed. These readings are more accurate than the human eye – differences of about six per cent are noticeable. ■

Front loaders

Omo Ultimate Front Loader (warm wash)	15
Omo Ultimate Front Loader	14
Omo Small & Mighty Alpine Fresh Front Loader (A)	20
Trimat (Aldi) Front Loader Concentrated Laundry Powder	10
Drive Ultra Concentrate Front Loader	24
Cussons Radiant High Performance Front Loader	19
Cussons Radiant Advanced Front Loader	30
Biozet Attack Front Loader Ultra Concentrate	20
Omo Small & Mighty Sensitive Front Loader	2
Surf With Essential Oils Ultra Concentrate Lavender and Oriental Blossom	23
Spree Ultra Concentrate Front Loader and High Efficiency Top Loader Lavender Fresh	10
Duo Ultra Concentrate Front Loader & High Efficiency Top Loader Linen Fresh	19
Fab With a Touch of Fabric Softener Frangipani Front Loader	84
IGA Signature Laundry Powder Front Loader	24
Earth Choice 2 x Ultra Front Loader Laundry Concentrate (warm wash)	30
Earth Choice 2 x Ultra Front Loader Laundry Concentrate	33
Woolworths Homebrand Laundry Powder Detergent	30
No detergent – cold wash front loader	na

Top loaders

Omo Ultimate Top Loader (warm wash)	14
Omo Ultimate Top Loader	14
Cussons Radiant Advanced Top Loader	20
Cussons Radiant High Performance Top Loader	18
Omo Small & Mighty Alpine Fresh Top Loader (A)	21
Trimat (Aldi) Top Loader Concentrated Laundry Powder	16
Biozet Attack Top Loader Ultra Concentrate	27
Drive Ultra Concentrate Top Loader	25
Spree Ultra Concentrate Lavender Fresh	8
Duo Ultra Concentrate Top Loader Linen Fresh	19
Surf With Essential Oils Ultra Concentrate Lavender and Oriental Blossom	24
Omo Small & Mighty Sensitive Top Loader	11
Woolworths Homebrand Laundry Powder Detergent	27
Fab With a Touch of Fabric Softener Frangipani Top Loader	9
Earth Choice 2 x Ultra Top Loader Laundry Concentrate	27
IGA Signature Laundry Powder Top Loader	23
Earth Choice 2 x Ultra Top Loader Laundry Concentrate (warm wash)	27
No detergent – cold wash top loader	na

PERFORMANCE										SPECIFICATIONS				
Cost per wash (c)	Overall dirt removal score (%)	General detergency score (%)	Clay score (%)	Natural oils score (%)	Rice starch score (%)	Vegetable oil score (%)	Grass score (%)	Motor oil score (%)	P or NP on packaging	Contains enzymes	Contains optical brighteners	Concentrate	Contact	Size of pack costed (kg)
79	81	87	80	66	81	88	79	66	NP	✓	✓	✓	omodirtsgood.com.au	1
79	75	81	66	63	77	86	75	61	NP	✓	✓	✓	omodirtsgood.com.au	1
47	74	81	63	62	79	86	73	60	NP	✓	✓	✓	omodirtsgood.com.au	0.875
31	70	82	53	63	57	80	72	55	P	✓	ns	✓	aldi.com.au	1
54	68	78	56	56	65	76	69	54	NP	✓	✓	✓	unilever.com.au	1
57	67	79	54	53	58	76	69	49	P	✓	✓	✓	radiantlaundry.com.au	1
50	66	76	51	55	67	76	73	49	P	✓	✓	✓	radiantlaundry.com.au	2.5
40	65	79	61	51	36	74	63	49	NP	✓	✓	✓	biozet.com.au	1
43	61	71	60	52	34	73	56	49	NP	ns	✓	✓	omodirtsgood.com.au	1
19	58	72	48	47	34	64	63	44	NP	✓	✓	✓	surflaundry.com.au	1.2
30	57	68	50	45	34	66	54	45	NP	✓	ns	✓	colgate.com.au	0.875
36	56	66	47	42	48	62	53	45	NP	✓	ns	✓	duolaundry.com.au	1
16	54	66	47	41	35	61	57	43	NP	✓	ns	✓	colgate.com.au	4
34	49	61	48	28	33	62	39	39	P	ns	ns	✓	1300 135 690	1
21	48	58	41	30	34	60	41	42	NP	ns	ns	✓	naturesorganics.com.au	1
21	45	54	41	25	35	59	40	38	NP	ns	ns	✓	naturesorganics.com.au	1
12	45	48	42	42	32	60	51	41	NP	ns	ns	✓	woolworths.com.au	4
0	36	35	48	22	30	51	35	37	na	na	na	✓	na	na

USING THE TABLES

Dirt removal score

is made up of general detergency (soil removal) score (40%), clay (15%), natural oils – sebum (15%), rice starch (10%), vegetable oil (10%), grass (5%) and motor oil (5%). All tests are done in cold water (20°C) apart from the two warm wash retests in each category.

P or NP on packaging

Phosphates, which contain phosphorus, help soften the water and keep extracted dirt in suspension. But high levels of phosphorus can lead to excessive growth of blue-green algae in inland waterways. **P** means low phosphorus (<7.8 g/wash) and **NP** is for no phosphorus or less than 0.5%.

Enzymes target protein, starch or biological-based stains such as grass or blood. Different enzymes target different stains. Enzymes are known to cause irritation, so avoid them if you have sensitive skin.

Optical brighteners

coat the fabric with fluorescers that absorb ultraviolet light and re-emit it as blue light, making the clothes look whiter and brighter even though they don't actually remove any dirt. Products with brighteners are best avoided by people with sensitive skin.

Packet size/number of washes

The most popular size we found in stores, calculated on the number of washes using the recommended dose for a normal wash (or lightly soiled if there isn't one).

Price This is the price we paid for the pack size listed in February 2012.

TABLE NOTES

ns Not stated.

na Not applicable.

(A) To be phased out by August 2012. Unilever confirmed the Omo Small & Mighty product is the same formulation without fragrance. CHOICE will be testing Omo Small & Mighty and reporting the results online.

PERFORMANCE										SPECIFICATIONS				
Cost per wash (c)	Overall dirt removal score (%)	General detergency score (%)	Clay score (%)	Natural oils score (%)	Rice starch score (%)	Vegetable oil score (%)	Grass score (%)	Motor oil score (%)	P or NP on packaging	Contains enzymes	Contains optical brighteners	Concentrate	Contact	Size of pack costed (kg)
85	67	81	60	42	63	71	64	53	NP	✓	✓	✓	omodirtsgood.com.au	1
85	64	76	60	48	54	73	45	57	NP	✓	✓	✓	omodirtsgood.com.au	1
50	61	83	54	37	35	69	42	47	P	✓	✓	✓	radiantlaundry.com.au	1.5
62	58	74	56	36	39	68	35	43	P	✓	✓	✓	radiantlaundry.com.au	1
44	58	69	57	40	48	66	31	53	NP	✓	✓	✓	omodirtsgood.com.au	0.875
30	57	71	55	38	40	65	33	46	P	✓	ns	✓	aldi.com.au	1
9	54	63	60	39	37	65	27	46	NP	✓	✓	✓	biozet.com.au	1
51	52	62	57	34	41	57	28	45	NP	✓	✓	✓	unilever.com.au	1
25	50	59	53	33	37	60	27	42	NP	✓	ns	✓	colgate.com.au	0.5
36	49	57	56	31	40	58	29	40	NP	✓	ns	✓	duolaundry.com.au	1
17	48	57	54	31	37	57	27	39	NP	✓	✓	✓	surflaundry.com.au	1.2
46	47	51	54	34	36	62	28	44	NP	ns	✓	✓	omodirtsgood.com.au	0.5
9	44	50	51	38	36	61	28	44	NP	ns	ns	✓	woolworths.com.au	4
51	43	48	50	26	37	51	27	35	NP	✓	ns	✓	colgate.com.au	0.5
8	41	44	48	29	35	51	26	33	NP	ns	ns	✓	naturesorganics.com.au	1
6	41	43	54	25	36	52	25	33	P	ns	ns	✓	1300 135 690	1
8	39	42	46	23	38	54	25	37	NP	ns	ns	✓	naturesorganics.com.au	1
0	36	36	49	19	34	49	24	36	na	na	na	✓	na	na



Drying out

Is your dryer the right model and properly set up for minimising energy costs? **Matthew Steen** finds out

When you use your dryer, you don't stand there watching it, poised for the moment the cooling cycle kicks in so you can switch it off and save some energy. Most people trust their machine to let its cycle run to the end, and this is why when CHOICE tests dryers we look at the entire cycle time. The Australian standard requires that only the energy required to get a load to a six per cent moisture content be measured, which doesn't have to include the cooling cycle. Because of this, some dryers have lower energy label claims – and more stars – than what we find.

You'll see a cost per kilo value in our table (right). If you multiply that cost by machine capacity, the maximum it will

Nutshell

- Only one of the eight new dryers on test makes our What to Buy list.
- Our testing finds some differences between energy star ratings and real-world performance.

cost is only about \$1.50 per load (for the model most expensive to run, the Haier HDY-60M). But consider those times when you need to do multiple loads a week, and the costs soon mount up. It's still cheaper than going to your local laundromat and paying \$2 a pop, but ▶

	COSTS			PERFORMANCE
	Price (\$)	Running costs (\$/10 years)	Cost per kg (c)	Overall score (%)
<5KG ELECTRIC VENTED				
Simpson 39P400M	429	1119	19	71
# Fisher & Paykel DE40F56A Aerodry	369	1582	26	54
# Omega OCD40WA	379	1302	22	53
5-7KG ELECTRIC VENTED				
Ariston AS600VX	799	1580	18	73
Simpson 39S600M	619	1568	18	73
Simpson 39S500M	559	1356	18	72
Bosch WTV74100AU/08	1049	1838	18	71
Electrolux EDV605	669	1783	20	67
# Electrolux EDV505 Sensor Dry	619	1477	20	67
Fisher & Paykel DE60F60EW1	669	1805	20	67
Whirlpool AWD60A	499	1742	20	67
# Fisher & Paykel DE50F56E1 Aerosense	439	1468	20	66
# Fisher & Paykel DE50F56A Aerologic	529	1584	21	63
# Haier HDY-60M	299	2262	25	58
6KG+ CONDENSER				
# Miele T7944C Honeycomb	1899	1829	17	70
Bosch WTE84101AU	1699	1992	19	68
# AEG T76280AC Lavatherm	1499	2402	20	67
Asko T 753C	1699	1744	20	67
LG TD-C809E	1839	2294	19	67
Haier HDY-C70	690	2190	21	64
Electrolux EDC47130W	949	2226	21	63
6-7KG - HEAT PUMP CONDENSER				
Bosch WTW86560AU/06 (A)	2899	792	8	80
GAS				
Rinnai Dry-Soft6	1999	804	9	71

USING THE TABLE SCORES The overall score is made up of energy efficiency, energy were included, gas dryers would score significantly higher. **Features** 22c/kWh and gas at 1.6589c/MJ (equivalent to 6c/kWh). **Price** Recommended Opt Optional. **Sup** Supplied.

FEATURES														SPECIFICATIONS									
Drying time score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Cycle time (min)	Noise (dB)	Energy used per load (kWh)	Controls	Reverse tumbling	Drying rack	Unit starts on door shut	Wall-mountable / stackable	Air exhaust (vent) location	Ducting kit	Filter location	Capacity (kg)	Dimensions (cm, W x H x D)	Contact								
67	93	103	54	3.39	T	✓		✓/✓	Front (B)	Opt	Inside front	4	60 x 80 x 51	simpson.com.au									
47	88	175	55	4.80	T			✓/✓	Front	Opt	Door	4	57 x 81 x 44	fp.com.au									
37	83	210	53	3.95	T			✓/✓	Rear	Opt	Inside rear	4	60 x 70 x 44	omegappliances.com.au									
72	88	128	55	4.79	S, T	✓		✓/✓	Rear	Sup	Inside front	6	60 x 83 x 56	aristonchannel.com									
70	93	139	57	4.75	T	✓		✓/✓	Front or rear	Opt	Inside front	6	61 x 80 x 62	simpson.com.au									
69	93	122	54	4.11	T	✓		✓/✓	Front (B)	Opt	Inside front	5	60 x 80 x 55	simpson.com.au									
69	87	169	54	5.57	S, T			-/✓	Rear or left side	Sup	Inside front	7	60 x 85 x 60	boschappliances.com.au									
64	85	174	57	5.40	S, T	✓		✓/✓	Front or rear	Opt	Inside front	6	60 x 80 x 60	electrolux.com.au									
64	85	145	57	4.48	S, T	✓		✓/✓	Front or rear	Opt	Inside front	5	60 x 80 x 57	electrolux.com.au									
63	93	192	57	5.47	S, T	✓		-/✓	Rear	Sup	Inside front	6	60 x 85 x 57	fp.com.au									
61	92	189	52	5.28	T		✓	✓/✓	Front door	na	Door	6	60 x 83 x 56	whirlpool.com.au									
60	87	161	55	4.45	S	✓	✓	✓/✓	Front or rear	Opt	Inside front	5	57 x 81 x 56	fp.com.au									
57	85	175	55	4.80	T	✓		✓/✓	Front or rear	Opt	Inside front	5	57 x 81 x 56	fp.com.au									
53	88	229	55	6.85	T	✓	✓	✓/✓	Rear	Opt	Door	6	60 x 85 x 62	haierlife.com.au									
68	83	174	52	5.54	S			-/✓	Front panel	na	Door & inside front	7	60 x 85 x 63	miele.com.au									
66	85	187	56	6.04	S, T			-/✓	Rear	na	Inside front	7	60 x 85 x 60	bosch.com.au									
64	87	229	54	7.28	S, T	✓		-/✓	Front panel	na	Inside front	8	60 x 85 x 60	aeg-electrolux.com.au									
64	87	171	56	5.28	S, T			-/✓	Front	na	Door	6	60 x 83 x 56	asko.com.au									
61	87	247	55	6.95	S, T	✓	✓	-/✓	Rear	na	Inside front	8	60 x 85 x 64	lge.com.au									
59	87	231	58	6.64	S, T			-/✓	Rear	na	Inside front	7	60 x 85 x 62	haierlife.com.au									
60	82	226	57	6.75	S, T	✓		-/✓	Front panel	na	Door	7	60 x 85 x 60	electrolux.com.au									
68	85	161	51	2.40	S, T			-/✓	Rear	na	Inside front	6.5	60 x 85 x 60	boschappliances.com.au									
80	88	88	59	6.15	S, T			✓/✓	Top panel	Sup	Inside rear	6	65 x 69 x 53	rinnai.com.au									

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%, drying time (40%) and ease of use (20%). The energy efficiency score takes into account only the energy used at the point of connection in your home; if production of the Whet to Look For, page 56. **Running costs** are based on drying a full load about three times a week (150 times a year) for 10 years and is calculated based on electricity at \$0.15/kWh, as at April 2012. **TABLE NOTES (A)** Replaced by the Bosch WTW86561AU, facelift only. **(B)** Rear option. **#** Newly tested model. **na** Not available. **T** Timer. **S** Sensor.

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reliability
 for results of our
 latest reliability
 survey

your most cost-effective option is a slower natural dry from the sun.

If you can't avoid using a dryer all the time – because you live in an apartment building with restrictive body corporate laws, for example – opt for one with a high energy-efficiency score. Use your home's ducting if available, as venting moisture back into your laundry space just makes the dryer work

harder to dry your clothes, costing you more in the long run. If you can't vent, consider a condenser model. ■

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Controls – autosensing vs timer

Some dryers have a timer that is set manually, while others have a sensor that detects when a load has reached a preset dryness level and switches off. It's easy to overshoot the drying level with timer dryers and waste energy, so aim for less time and check your clothes periodically to avoid this as well as damage to the clothes.

Wall-mountable or stackable

Mounting a dryer on the wall or stacking it on top of a front-loading washing machine saves space.

Reverse tumbling The drum reverses direction at regular

WHAT TO BUY

Models listed right and below are for each size bracket and type, including Best Buys that cost the least to buy and run. We nominate the Rinnai gas dryer as our Green Buy as it's the best option for reducing CO₂ emissions. The Rinnai is comparatively cheap to run but expensive to buy and install. An energy-efficient electric dryer connected to 100% green power, such as solar, is another green option.

intervals to minimise tangling while evenly drying clothes.

Dryer filters need regular cleaning, so it's helpful if the filter is at the front. While most are on or near the door, the Rinnai's is located at the rear of the drum and is hard to reach to remove and refit if the dryer is floor-mounted or mounted too high.

Vents/ducting Unless you have an exhaust fan or can put your dryer near a window, you're likely to need a venting kit. Some dryers come with one, while for others it's an optional extra. Not all ducting kits suit all situations, so discuss installation with the sales staff to make sure you get what you need. Some dryers that have a vent at the front can't be ducted, making a fan or window more important.

Drainage Condenser dryers either have a reservoir or can be plumbed to a drainage pipe. All on test have both options. We recommend plumbing, as the reservoir stops the dryer when full – meaning you need to be around to empty it and restart the dryer.

A **drying rack** can be mounted inside some models to hold items such as gym shoes or delicates. Some can be attached to the front of the vent.

6KG+ CONDENSER DRYERS

70%

Miele T7944C Honeycomb

Good points

- Can be stacked
- More features and options

Bad points

- No drying rack supplied
- Relatively high running costs



LESS THAN 5KG – ELECTRIC VENTED

Simpson 39P400M \$429 

5-7KG – ELECTRIC VENTED

Ariston AS600VX \$799 

Simpson 39S600M \$619 

Simpson 39S500M \$559 

5-7KG – HEAT PUMP CONDENSERS

Bosch EcoLogixx 7
WTW86560AU/06 \$2899

GAS

Rinnai Dry-Soft 6 \$1999 

THE SUN / NATURAL CONVECTION

A clothes line / rack \$50+ 

For details on how we test clothes dryers, as well as comprehensive information on what to look for and to compare all models on test, log on to choice.com.au/ dryers

I AM THE STIG

CHOICE's Michael Hohl hit the road to test tyres

Nutshell

► The performance difference between the best and worst tyres on test can easily mean the difference between a scare and an accident in an emergency.

Tread carefully

You can't rely on price, tread pattern or brand name to find the best-performing car tyre, says **Michael Hohl**

Every few years your car needs new tyres. At the dealership you'll see a wall of rubber from a wide range of manufacturers and price points.

But brand names, price and tread patterns aren't reliable guides to a tyre's performance. Tyres connect your car to the road, and while most do that well enough for everyday driving, in an emergency situation or less-than-ideal conditions the difference between the best and worst of them is dramatic.

Our test results aim to give you this essential information. Here we look at 18 models of size 215/60R16, suitable for at least some versions

of popular current and older-model family cars such as the Ford Falcon (our test car), Honda Accord and Odyssey, Mazda MPV and Toyota Aurion.

Slippery when wet

In dry conditions, there's a difference of about one metre between the best and worst performers from 50km/h, and of about three metres from 80km/h. These distances double in wet conditions.

The Kumho and Ovation models took the longest to stop our test car from all speeds and in all conditions, while the Dunlop performed consistently well, with the GT Radial matching it in the wet. The Michelin corners well on a dry road, but in wet conditions is bettered by the GT Radial and Continental,

and matched by a number of other models. The Kumho is worst in both conditions, equalled by the Ovation in the wet.

You can't directly compare the dry and wet cornering scores in our table (page 59) as they're based on a different combination of test speeds. At 80km/h (the speed used in both conditions) none of the tyres offer nearly as much grip in the wet as on a dry road. The same is true for braking – so always slow down in wet conditions. ▶

THANK YOU



We'd like to thank Morgan Park Raceway in Warwick, Qld, for ensuring a smooth test, and Ford Australia for providing the Falcon XT test car.

360

Estimated number of tyre changes carried out for this test

6000

Number of kilometres our testers drove for this test (including the return trip from Sydney to Warwick)

Warwick 785

WHAT TO BUY



80%

GT Radial Champiro 228,
\$132



76%

Continental Conti Comfort
Contact CC5, \$229



76%

Dunlop SP Sport 300E,
\$163



76%

Goodyear Eagle NCT5,
\$167



75%

BF Goodrich Sport T/A,
\$153



75%

Michelin Energy-XM2
Green X, \$168

ABOUT THE REST

We test car tyres in extreme situations that you'd normally only encounter in an emergency. In everyday driving conditions the differences indicated by our scores may not be as noticeable.

But emergency performance is what really counts. Our recommended tyres will help you keep better control of your car in such situations, and could mean the difference between a scare and a crash.

To find out how we test tyres, go to choice.com.au/testingtyres

SPECIAL DESIGNS

- Some tyres are **directional**, which means they're designed to be fitted to the car so their tread pattern faces a particular way (usually marked with an arrow on the sidewall). Fitting them on the wrong side may affect your car's handling and reduce the tyre's life. If you use these and don't have a conventional tyre as a spare, be aware that a directional spare only fits one side of the car. If you have to use it on the wrong side, drive carefully and replace the damaged tyre as quickly as you can.
- Asymmetric** models are designed to be fitted to the rim so that a

particular side (marked on the tyre's sidewall) faces outwards. With these, the spare can replace any of the other tyres.

- Some car models have a **space-saver** (narrower) spare instead of a full-size one. If you have to use it, follow the instructions in your user manual. There's likely to be a speed limit, and you're only supposed to drive on it for a short distance to get you home or to the nearest tyre fitter. You may damage your car if you use it over longer distances or at higher speeds.



HOW TO READ A TYRE

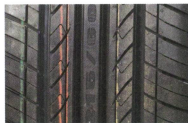
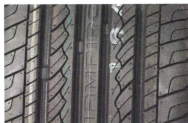
Each tyre has standard markings that allow you to pick the right size and type for your car. It's a confusing mix of letters and numbers, and of measurements in millimetres and inches. Here's what it all means, using the code for the size on test – P215/60R16 95H.

- **P** stands for passenger tyre.
- **215** is the section width (in mm) when the tyre is fitted to the recommended rim, inflated to the recommended pressure and not under load. The section width is the distance between the tyre's exterior sidewalls.
- **60** is a percentage describing the tyre's profile or aspect ratio. It's the ratio between the tyre's section height (distance from the wheel bead seat to the top of the tyre) and its section width – in this case, 60%.
- **R** stands for radial, which is the most common construction method for passenger car tyres.
- **16** refers to the diameter (in inches) of the rim the tyre should be fitted to.
- **95** is the load rating index, which tells you the maximum weight one tyre can carry (in this case, 690kg). Other examples: 84 (500kg), 86 (530kg), 89 (580kg), 92 (630kg) and 94 (670kg).
- **H** is the speed rating index and tells you the maximum speed at which the tyre can travel (in this case, 210km/h). Other examples: S (180km/h), T (190km/h), V (240km/h) and W (270km/h).



WHICH WOULD YOU PICK?

These two tread patterns are very similar, and so are the tyres' prices. Yet the one on top belongs to the best tyre on test (GT Radial), the one on the bottom to one of the worst (Ovation).



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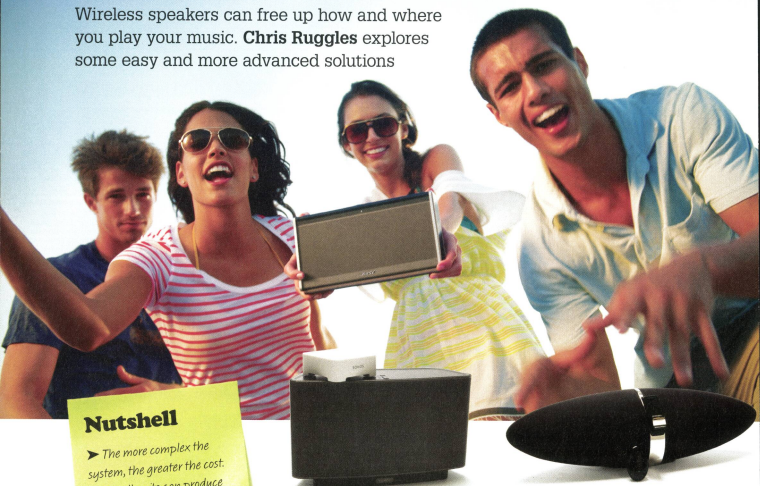
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		PERFORMANCE						SPECIFICATIONS	
	Price per tyre (\$)	Overall score (%)	Dry cornering score (%)	Wet cornering score (%)	Dry braking score (%)	Wet braking score (%)	Speed rating	Special design	Contact
GT Radial Champiro 228	132	80	80	75	90	75	V	na	gtradial.com.au
Continental Conti Comfort Contact CC5	229	76	80	70	85	70	V	Asymmetrical	continental-tyres.com.au
Dunlop SP Sport 300E	163	76	75	65	95	75	V	na	dunloptyres.com.au
Goodyear Eagle NCT5	167	76	80	65	90	70	V	na	goodyear.com.au
BF Goodrich Sport T/A	153	75	80	65	90	65	H	Directional	bfgoodrich.com.au
Michelin Energy-XM2 Green X	168	75	85	65	85	65	H	Asymmetrical	micelin.com.au
Firestone TZ700	154	72	75	60	90	65	V	na	bridgestone.com.au
Goodyear Radial SP06	120	71	70	65	90	60	H	na	(03) 9702 3877
Maxxis MA-P1 VIP	129	71	65	65	90	70	H	na	maxxistyres.com.au
Nexen Classe Premiere CP661	125	70	70	60	85	70	H	na	yhi.com.au/tyres
Pirelli P7	159	70	65	65	85	70	V	Asymmetrical	pirelli.com.au
Toyot Teo Plus Eco	162	69	75	60	85	55	H	na	toyotires.com.au
Kelly Charger GT	149	67	70	60	85	55	H	na	tyrepower.com.au
Bridgestone Turanza ER30	155	65	60	60	85	60	V	na	bridgestone.com.au
Yokohama A.drive	166	64	65	55	85	55	H	na	yokohama.com.au
Sime Tyres Astar 100	105	62	60	50	85	60	V	na	sime tyre.com.au
Ovation Eco Vision VI-682	120	59	60	45	80	55	H	na	ovationtyres.com.au
Kumho Solus KH17	155	55	50	45	80	50	V	na	kumho.com.au

USING THE TABLE Price per tyre Recommended retail, as of March 2012. **Scores** The overall score is made up of dry cornering at 80 and 85km/h (30%), wet cornering at 70, 75 and 80km/h (30%), dry braking at 50 and 80km/h (20%) and wet braking at 50 and 80km/h (20%). **Speed ratings and special designs** See How to Read a Tyre, above, and Special Designs, left. **na** Not applicable.

The sound of freedom

Wireless speakers can free up how and where you play your music. **Chris Ruggles** explores some easy and more advanced solutions



Nutshell

- The more complex the system, the greater the cost.
- Small units can produce acceptable sound, but there will be compromises.

Struggling with speaker wires is one of the more annoying aspects of setting up your home entertainment system – they get in the way and limit where you can put your speakers. A wireless speaker eliminates this problem.

In this test we look at some battery-powered speakers that can go anywhere, as well as some more powerful models that require a power point. The three scenarios outlined here will help you decide which will suit your needs.

01 70% Sonos Play:5, \$599
+ \$79 for Sonos Bridge

02 67% Bowers & Wilkins
Zeppelin Air, \$799

	COSTS		PERFORMANCE	FEATURES					
	Price (\$)	Annual standby power costs (\$)	Overall score (%)	CONNECTIVITY					
				Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Standby energy score (%)	iPod dock	iPad dock	Remote control
Sonos Play:5	599	18.20	70	75	71	0			
Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin Air	799	9.90	67	70	71	0	✓	✓ (A)	✓
NAD Viso 1	699	14.40	61	65	63	0	✓		✓
Bose SoundLink LX	499	0.50	58	50	73	100			✓
Logitech Wireless Boombox	200	0.60	58	50	71	100			✓
Sony Network Speaker	229	3.60	36	30	58	0			✓

SERIOUSLY NETWORKED

Portability is a bonus, but you want to be able to have speakers in separate rooms that can be controlled from a single point.

The **Sonos Play:5** (see 01 below) is a clear recommendation in this category. Our panellists liked its sound and commented on its depth and clarity in the top notes. As a single speaker it has just enough bass, but the Sonos Bridge allows you to interconnect as many speakers as you want in order to add more oomph. Each speaker can act alone or, if there are two in a room, you can split the left and right channels so you have stereo sound.

STAND-ALONE

A single unit that can fill a small flat or larger room with sound. Both these models have an iPod dock.

The **Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin Air** (02) may have an unusual shape, but our listening panellists gave it a good score. However, they noted the bass

is a bit boomy and over-powering at times.

The **NAD Viso 1** (03) looks pretty beefy, but at about 5.6kg it's half a kilo lighter than the Bowers & Wilkins. Our panel wasn't as impressed with its sound either. They scored it OK, noting good balance with some tracks, but felt the sound lacked drama overall.

HIGHLY MOBILE

Looking for something light, portable and with a battery as well as mains power that's Bluetooth-enabled?

The two on test that fit this category are the **Bose SoundLink LX** (04) and **Logitech Wireless Boombox** (05). Our listening panel found the sound from both acceptable, but noted both lack clarity in high notes and their middle tones are often muddy. The Bose can manage quite a bit of bass for its size, but tends to be boomy and harsh. Both are relatively small, light (just

NOT RECOMMENDED

The **Sony Network Speaker** is relatively cheap (\$229) and small, and a number of these in party mode can play the same music in different rooms. But our listening panel found it under-powered – it struggled with even the least demanding tracks. It also only talks to Windows PCs and will only play music from Windows Media Player.

over 1kg) and can run off rechargeable batteries, so they will be useful for outdoor parties or travelling. They connect to any Bluetooth device, and the Bose has a USB port as well. Neither will connect to a Wi-Fi home network, but both have an aux-in connection to physically connect a player that isn't Bluetooth-enabled. ■



03 61% NAD
Viso 1, \$699



04 58% Bose
SoundLink LX, \$499



05 58% Logitech
Wireless Boombox, \$200

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SPECIFICATIONS

Music source

Sonos app running on PC, Mac, iPod, iPhone or Android
iTunes
Any device with Bluetooth support
Any device with Bluetooth support
Any device with Bluetooth support
Windows Media Player (via "play to")

3.5mm aux-in	USB	Ethernet	Headphones output	Video output	Dimensions (cm. H x W x D)	Weight (kg)	Batteries	Contact
✓		2	✓		22 x 36.5 x 12.5	4.14	na	sonos.com.au
✓	✓	✓		✓	18.5 x 64 x 21.5	6.14	na	convoy.com.au
		✓ (C)		✓	26.5 x 48.5 x 30	5.57	na	audioproducts.com.au
		✓ (C)			13.5 x 24.5 x 1.5	1.27	Li-Ion	bose.com.au
	✓				13 x 39 x 12	1.15	NiMH	logitech.com
	✓	✓			12.5 x 14 x 14	0.48	na	sony.com.au

USING THE TABLE Scores

The overall score is made up of performance (70%), ease of use (25%) and standby energy (5%). **Dimensions** rounded up to nearest 0.5cm. **Weight** excludes power lead, rounded to nearest 0.1kg. **Standby power costs/year** are calculated based on 22c/kWh. **TABLE NOTES (A)** iPad can be docked and will charge, but direct control of the speakers is not supported. **(B)** Proprietary wireless network. **(C)** Firmware updates only. **na** Not applicable. **Price** Recommended retail, as of May 2012.



Surrounded by sound

AV receivers are about more than blowing you out of your seat.

Chris Ruggles guides you through some myths around their sound

Anyone who's recently been to the movies will understand the power of surround sound. It can be used to create subtle landscapes with barely audible clues to the onscreen action, or lift you out of your seat with explosions. In your home, an AV receiver can help provide a similar experience.

But that's just the beginning. They can also play stereo sound, manage a large number of inputs (DVD, Blu-ray, DVR, AM/FM or internet radio) and outputs (TV, projector, speakers). Add wireless connectivity, a remote control with a learning function and a few apps on

your smartphone or tablet, and things can become quite complicated.

Unfortunately, the audio market is awash with hype and folklore that has little to do with reality. Check out our What to Look For section opposite for our tips on what you need and what you don't.

Listen up, it's technical

CHOICE's listening and technical scores will often not be entirely in sync.

Listening scores are based on our team of three trained listeners' appraisal of the sound quality produced at a given volume measured at the listener's position, using

the same speakers and Blu-ray player under the same conditions. The only variable is the AV receiver. In each case we use the calibration feature, check they aren't wildly incorrect and only correct serious errors. The differences between the recommended models (page 64) are subtle, and a different set of speakers in a different room will produce different results, but we're confident all six models can give a good listening experience.

Technical scores are based on a variety of tests that indicate how well the AV receiver is designed or can cope with some difficult situations. All products on test are OK or better.

The power factor

A common misconception is that an amplifier with a power rating of 100W per channel is capable of twice as much sound output as one with 50W per channel. In fact, it's only an increase of about 20% – to get twice the sound output you'd need a 500W per channel amp. Another common misconception is that the amp delivers all its power when you're listening to music. In fact, it's only delivering between one and five watts

most of the time. The extra power is needed to deal with quick transitions such as the sound of bullets ricocheting off metal. Although this is important to help avoid distortions, there's no way to tell which amp will perform better in this respect based on what the manufacturer says, as they're rarely based on the same testing parameters. Trained ears are good for picking up these faults, which is one reason we use an expert panel. ▶

Common interests

Things they (almost) all have

- Programmable remote control (except the Anthem and Cambridge)
- AM/FM tuners and antennas are supplied
- RDS (radio data system), except the Anthem and Pioneer
- Headphones socket at the front
- 1080p upscaling for HDMI input (except both Marantz models)
- Audio return channel (except the Anthem)
- Lip sync correction
- LAN connection (except the Anthem and Cambridge)

Things they (almost) all don't have

- S-video input/output (Cambridge and Denon each have two inputs, but no output)
- Digital audio outputs (Anthem and Cambridge each have both RCA and optical; both Harmon Kardons have one optical)
- DSD decoding (used on SACD discs)
- Digital input for zone 2 function (they are all restricted to analog inputs). The Cambridge, Harmon Kardon AVR265 and Marantz NR1602 don't support zone 2 at all

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Upscaling describes converting one video format to another of a higher resolution. All models on test except both Marantzes support this feature.

3D-ready The latest HDMI 1.4 standard has been introduced to provide a framework to ensure there are no bottlenecks between the player, AV receiver and the TV when moving the large amounts of information associated with 3D content.

A/B speakers allow you to turn an additional set of speakers on or off using the same audio.

Zone 2 allows the receiver to send a second source signal to speakers, or a separate audio system in another location. All models on test except the Cambridge, Harmon Kardon AVR265 and Marantz NR1602 have a Zone 2, but those that do will only work with analog inputs for the second zone.

RDS (radio data system) is an FM radio feature that displays information about the program being broadcast.

Total harmonic distortion (THD) can be a useful indicator of the quality of amplification. But the figures are often presented by manufacturers in a way that puts their

product in the best possible light, so take them with a grain of salt.

Automatic calibration is helpful when setting up a system with a calibration mic. But some units won't recognise all your speakers, so adjustments may need to be made manually.

7.1 systems If a 7.1 system supports zone 2, you can enjoy a 5.1 speaker-based movie played on a DVD player in one room and stereo music from another source such as a radio or iPod in another.

HDMI is a digital connection via a single cord that does everything for both sound and vision. Version 1.3a can deal with a DVD or Blu-ray disc; HDMI version 1.4 is needed for the full effect of the latest 3D Blu-ray movies.

Audio return channel (ARC) is a relatively new feature that allows audio from the TV to be sent back to the AV receiver via HDMI.



WHAT TO BUY



\$1199

77% Denon AVR-2312

Our expert listening panellists rated this model equal best. They liked its surround sound balance and scored it highly for stereo. It has two S-video inputs – handy for older components such as VCRs. Our tester rated it best on test for its onscreen interface. Unfortunately, no printed manual is supplied – an inconvenience if you want to do anything more complicated than the basic setup. The remote control has effective glow-in-the-dark buttons, but they're small and tightly spaced.



\$1080

77% Marantz NR1602

Our panellists liked this receiver's balance and sound clarity. They felt it lacked a little bass and the surround sound balance tended to be in the front, but this can be changed through manual settings. Its power supply appears under-powered for the rated output per channel, which could result in clipping at high-volume settings. Most of the buttons and labels on the remote are small, and their glow is not very bright. No hard copy manual is supplied, and it may not handle poorly designed speakers well.



\$1320

75% Marantz SR5006

Our panellists were impressed with the stereo image from this model. They also liked its balance for surround sound, but felt it was a little too much in front. It has an exceptionally small front panel display with limited information. Most buttons and labels on the remote are small and their glow is not very bright, no printed manual is supplied and radio tuning can't be done via the front panel controls. It achieves a relatively low damping factor in our technical assessment, so may not handle poorly designed speakers well.

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PERFORMANCE

FEATURES

SPECIFICATIONS

			PERFORMANCE										FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS					
	Price (\$)	Overall score (%)	Listening panel score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Technical score (%)	Remote control score (%)	Standby power score (%)	Measured power per channel (stereo, W)	Residual distortion (%)	HDMI version	Zones	Speakers A/B	Accepted speaker impedance (ohm)	Remote control can be programmed for other devices	Learning remote	Video component RCA	HDMI	Digital audio RCA	Toslink	HDMI	USB	
Denon AVR-2312	1199	77	83	68	75	66	100	130	0.011	1.4a	2	16, 8, 6	✓			2	6	2	2	1	1	
Marantz NR1602	1080	77	82	70	80	54	100	60	0.06	1.4a	1	8, 6	✓	✓		2	4	1	1	0	1	
Marantz SR5006	1320	75	82	68	74	54	100	125	0.01	1.4a	2	8, 6	✓	✓		2	6	2	2	0	1	
Yamaha RX-V771	1299	74	83	59	82	46	100	110	0.015	ns	2	16, 8, 6, (A)	✓			2	5	2	2	1	1	
Pioneer VSX-921	1099	73	82	66	66	51	100	110	0.055	ns	2	✓ 16, 8, 6	✓			2	4	1	2	0	1	
Yamaha RX-A810	1599	72	80	59	78	46	100	110	0.028	ns	2	16, 8, 6, (A)	✓	✓		2	7	2	2	1	1	
Harman Kardon AVR265	1199	69	77	52	78	51	100	90	0.025	1.4a	1	8	✓			2	5	2	2	0	1	
Harman Kardon AVR365	1499	69	73	50	79	59	100	100	0.004	1.4a	2	8	✓	✓		2	5	2	2	1	1	
Sony STR-DN1020	1199	69	70	54	83	62	100	100	0.005	ns	2	✓ 16, 8	✓			2	4	1	2	0	1	
Cambridge Azur551R	1299	66	70	66	70	48	60	100	0.003	1.4	1	8, 6, 4	✓			2	4	4	4	0	0	
Anthem MRX300	1499	57	45	56	70	62	100	115	0.07	ns	2	8	✓			3	4	2	3	0	0	

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of listening panel (40%), ease of use (25%), technical (20%), remote control (10%) and standby power (5%). **Features** For detailed descriptions of the listed. **Measured power per channel (stereo)** is calculated at total harmonic distortion <1% into 8 ohms, front left and front right, in watts at the lowest output from 80Hz to 15kHz. **Residual distortion** % 1W into 8 ohms higher distortion and mask the amplifier's output. **Dimensions** are rounded to nearest 0.5cm. **Weight** is rounded to nearest 0.1kg. **Price** Recommended retail, as of March 2012. **TABLE NOTES (A)** 4 ohm speakers



• \$1299

74% Yamaha RX-V771

Our panellists rated this model equal best for listening. They particularly liked its balance with surround sound and stereo music. Its power supply seems under-powered for the rated output per channel, and the room calibration does not report missing speakers – it simply assumes you don't want to use them. No printed manual is supplied. Remote control buttons are small or very small with tight spacing and very small labelling and it has equal worst onboard controls.



• \$1099

73% Pioneer VSX-921

Our panellists found the overall sound very good, but said it was very "full" and "hot", with a slightly lower bass level than some of the others. It has no RDS, and its power supply appears under-powered for the rated output per channel. The remote control has small, tightly spaced buttons with very small overcrowded and unintuitive labelling, and their glow isn't bright. In our technical assessment, it achieves a relatively low damping factor. Its auto-calibration feature incorrectly reported a surround speaker out of phase.



• \$1599

72% Yamaha RX-A810

Our experts scored this model highly for surround sound, but were less impressed with the stereo output, describing it as slightly "muddy" in high-energy passages. Its power supply appears under-powered for the rated output per channel. As with the other Yamaha, the room calibration does not report missing speakers. The remote control buttons are small to very small, tightly spaced and have very small labels, and it has equal-worst onboard controls. No printed manual is supplied.

ABOUT THE REST

All but one of the AV receivers on test were scored as good or very good by our listening panel.

The **Harmon Kardon** models have power supplies that appear under-powered for the rated output per channel. Their room calibration doesn't report missing speakers and didn't detect a speaker with reversed phase. They have fans, which may cause issues when they get dusty. The remote controls have small, tightly spaced buttons and very small labels (although the AVR365 has good backlighting). No printed manual is supplied, and their radio tuners are difficult to use.

The **Sony's** power supply is under-powered. Its room calibration is difficult to use and assumes you don't want to use a centre speaker if it's missing. The remote control has some small buttons and labelling. Radio tuning requires a TV connection. Its printed user manual is the best we looked at and it has the lowest hum and noise levels.

The **Cambridge** has two S-video inputs, which may be handy for older components such as VCRs. It has no network connectivity or provision for user update of the firmware. Its fan may become noisy once it gets dusty with age. The remote control has small buttons and very small labelling. The body of the receiver "rings" easily when struck and could resonate in sympathy with music being played.

The panel found the **Anthem** lacked balance and was harsh in the mid tones. Its auto-calibration is slow, overly complicated and inaccurate. It has no network connectivity, few features and the most hum and noise of any model in this test.

HDMI out	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Weight (kg)	Contact
1	16.5 x 43.5 x 38.5	11.3	audioproducts.com.au
1	11 x 43.5 x 37	8.6	qualifi.com.au
1	16 x 43.5 x 38.5	10.8	qualifi.com.au
2	17.5 x 43.5 x 37	11.1	yamaha.com.au
1	17 x 43.5 x 36.5	10.1	pioneer.com.au
2	17.5 x 43.5 x 37	11.2	yamaha.com.au
1	16.5 x 44 x 38.5	11.2	ehifi.com.au
1	16.5 x 44 x 38.5	12.1	ehifi.com.au
1	16 x 43 x 32.5	9.0	sony.com.au
1	11 x 43 x 34.5	10.4	synergyaudio.com
1	16.5 x 44 x 37.5	13.4	audioactive.net.au

For more, see What to Look For at choice.com.au/receivers.
 1, stereo, lower figures are better, but speakers will typically have much
 connected to front L/R channels only. **ns** Not stated.

Vying for attention

HD camcorders deliver good-quality video and are more affordable than ever, but are they still relevant, asks Denis Gallagher

So why bother?

The HD camcorder is still a good option for movie-makers who don't want to take still images and want more creative control. Each of the recommended models (right) provides a compelling mix of functionality, features and control that you still can't get with a smartphone or digital camera.

There was a time when the only way that you could record good-quality video was with a good-quality camcorder. However, thanks to the startling improvements in HD video quality on digital SLRs, compact cameras and smartphones, a dedicated HD camcorder might only be on your shopping list if you're a particularly eager video enthusiast.

If you own a smartphone, it's worth selecting the video mode to see what movie magic you can create – you may be pleasantly surprised. If you don't, consider a compact digital still camera (or a DSLR if your budget allows) for taking good stills and HD video. Compact still cameras and digital SLRs now offer a viable HD video option, with optical zoom and menu controls perfectly suited to taking video as well as stills, so even video enthusiasts should consider whether a good-quality digital still camera can deliver everything they're looking for in a single package. ■

IMAGE: SONY

		PERFORMANCE										FEATURES	
	Price (\$)	Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Daylight picture quality score (%)	Artificial light picture quality score (%)	Low light picture quality score (%)	Image stabilisation score (%)	Autofocus score (%)	Still photo score (%)	Length of operation (mins)	Accessory shoe	Infrared remote control
Canon Legria HF G10	1599	73	64	68	75	71	80	63	95	88	113	✓	✓
# Sony HDR-PJ260V	899	73	60	75	83	80	55	60	95	90	140		✓
# Sony HDR-PJ260V	799	73	58	78	83	80	55	60	95	90	105		
# Panasonic HC-V700	799	71	72	57	68	68	60	70	95	82	75	✓	
Panasonic HDC-SD900	1399	65	68	50	75	70	50	40	95	77	108	✓	✓
# Sony HDR-CX190	399	65	61	61	65	62	55	60	95	77	91	✓	✓
Panasonic HDC-HS900	1899	64	66	50	68	70	50	40	95	72	95		
# Sony HDR-PJ200E	499	64	59	61	65	62	55	60	95	62	75	✓	
Panasonic HDC-SD90	749	63	64	50	61	58	60	47	95	77	107		
Canon Legria HF R26	499	59	57	64	51	55	45	33	93	76	71		
Canon Legria HF R28	649	59	57	64	51	55	45	33	93	76	71		
Panasonic HDC-SD80	899	58	66	62	55	45	40	40	74	67	117		
Panasonic HDC-HS80	899	58	65	62	55	45	40	40	74	67	117		
Samsung HMX-H300	449	58	53	51	69	58	50	43	82	70	153		
Panasonic HDC-SD40	449	54	60	50	54	50	35	40	90	41	155		
JVC Everio GZ-HM670	649	52	54	58	58	58	50	43	38	49	124		
# Toshiba Camileo X400	349	50	59	33	45	40	50	37	64	66	85	✓	

WHAT TO BUY



\$899

73%

Sony HDR-PJ260V

Good points

- Very good performance in daylight and artificial lighting conditions
- Excellent still photo performance
- GPS mode for geotagging video/photos
- Includes a pico projector that produces a reasonable-quality video projection directly from the camera when placed less than 3m from the wall in a dark room
- More than two hours of recording time on fully charged battery

Bad points

- Performance in low light only OK



\$799

73%

Sony HDR-XR260V

Good points

- Very good performance in daylight and artificial lighting conditions
- 160GB HDD and SDXC memory card
- Excellent still photo performance
- GPS mode for geotagging video/photos

Bad points

- Less than two hours of recording time on fully charged battery

OTHER WHAT TO BUYS

Canon Legria HF G10

[CHOICE, Dec 11/Jan 12]

\$1599



\$799

71%

Panasonic HC-V700

Good points

- Easy to operate
- Good image stabiliser
- Very good still photo performance

Bad points

- Audio performance not as good as the top-performing models
- Only 75 minutes video recording on fully charged battery

To find out how we test camcorders, as well as details of what to look for, log on to choice.com.au/camcorders

SPECIFICATIONS

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	Microphone input	Headphone socket	LCD viewfinder with dioptic adjustment	Optical image stabiliser	Recording media	Optical zoom	LCD monitor size (mm)	Weight (g)	Dimensions (cm: H x W x L)	Claimed camera image resolution (megapixels)	Contact
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Flash memory 32GB/ 2x SDXC memory card	10	87 569	8 x 9 x 15	2.1	canon.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Flash memory 16GB/ SDXC memory card	30	75 369	6.2 x 6.8 x 12.9	8.9	sony.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	160GB HDD/SDXC memory card	30	75 405	6.2 x 6.8 x 12.9	8.9	sony.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	SDXC memory card	21	77 314	7 x 6.5 x 12	5.8	panasonic.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	SDXC memory card	12	87 454	7.5 x 7 x 14.5	14.2	panasonic.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	SDXC memory card	25	66 217	5.3 x 6.3 x 11.4	5.3	sony.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	HDD 120GB, memory card	12	87 510	7.5 x 7.5 x 14.5	14.2	panasonic.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	SDXC / MemoryStick Pro Duo memory card	25	66 217	5.3 x 6.3 x 11.4	5.3	sony.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	SDXC memory card	21	76 286	6 x 6 x 12	5.0	panasonic.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Flash memory 8GB / 2x SDXC memory card	20	75 305	6 x 7.5 x 12.5	2.1	canon.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Flash memory 32GB / 2x SDXC memory card	20	75 305	6 x 7.5 x 12.5	2.1	canon.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	SDXC memory card	37	67 233	6 x 5.5 x 11	2.6	panasonic.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	HDD 120GB, SDXC memory card	37	67 304	6 x 6.5 x 11.5	2.6	panasonic.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	SDHC memory card	30	75 278	6.5 x 6 x 12	4.9	samsung.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	SDXC memory card	17	66 210	5.5 x 5.5 x 11	2.1	panasonic.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Internal flash 32GB, SDXC memory card	40	67 231	5.5 x 5 x 12	3.2	jvc.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	SDHC memory card	23	76 320	5.8 x 6.5 x 11.9	5.0	toshiba.com.au	

USING THE TABLE Due to changes in our test method, results can't be compared with our test in CHOICE Dec 11/Jan 12. All camcorders on test support USB2 and HDMI output for watching video on an HD TV (although you may need to use a mini-HDMI cable), and all support AVCHD video format except the Samsung HMX-H300. All models can record HD video to a removable SD card, although some have an additional option to record to flash memory or an internal hard disk drive (HDD). All have a backlight function, and all except the Panasonic HDC-SD40 and Sony HDR-CX190 have a touchscreen.

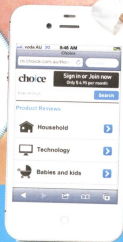
Scores The overall score is made up of ease of use (25%), sound quality (15%), daylight picture quality (10%), artificial light picture quality (10%), low light picture quality (10%), image stabilisation (10%), autofocus (10%), and still photo (10%). **Price** Recommended retail, as of May 2012.

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Rolling stock

Testing to the new Australian standard means we now recommend fewer strollers, says **Rebecca Gatto**

In our recent test of strollers (*CHOICE*, April 2012) we based our recommendations on the 2009 version of the Australian standard. While mandatory requirements are still based on the year 2000 standard, the revised version improves on safety.

Since April we've added results for six four-wheeled strollers, priced from \$180 to \$450, to the list (see below). But only one, the Steelcraft Profile, is recommended. The Valco Baby Quad is worth considering. Its locking devices are accessible to a child restrained in the seat, however due to the stroller's design we consider this unlikely and therefore a minor technical failure.

We can't recommend the rest. Most fail the new test, which checks that loops formed by the harness straps, when buckled together, aren't a strangulation hazard should a child slip through the loop and get caught. In addition, the Peg Perego doesn't have an adequate head barrier and its secondary locking device doesn't engage automatically when the stroller is opened. With the Safety 1st, the gaps between the seat-reclining mechanism pose a pinching hazard. ■

WHAT TO BUY



Steelcraft Profile

Good points

- Passes all our important safety and durability tests
- Leg cover

Bad points

- Minor failure of information requirements

We're currently testing another six strollers, and these results will be updated online. For full details, including how we test and what to look for, refer to *CHOICE* April 2012 or log on to choice.com.au/strollers



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PERFORMANCE	FEATURES	SPECIFICATIONS										
Price (\$)	Passed all our key safety tests	Passed all our durability tests	Ease of use score (%)	Front bar	Backrest recline positions	Rear brakes	Maximum recommended weight of child (kg)	Bottom basket capacity (kg)	Stroller weight (kg)*	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)**	Contact	
RECOMMENDED												
Steelcraft Profile	180	✓	✓	65	✓	5	I	17	4	8.9	104 x 51 x 90	britax.com.au
WORTH CONSIDERING												
Valco Baby Quad	450	✓	✓	65	✓	(A)	L	22	7	10.5	117 x 57 x 113	valco.com.au
NOT RECOMMENDED												
Babylove Adventurer	189	✓	✓	70	✓	5	L	17	4	8.7	103 x 50 x 93	www.babylove.com.au
MacLaren Techno XT	419	✓	✓	65	✓	4	L	20	2	8.5	111 x 48 x 94	cnprbrands.com.au
Peg Perego Pliko Mini	299	✓	✓	65	✓	3	L	15	5	6.4	102 x 50 x 97	www.babylove.com.au
Safety 1st Shuttle	450	✓	✓	60	✓	3(B)	L	20	4	11.5	106 x 62 x 107	www.igcdorel.com.au

USING THE TABLE Safety and durability tests A stroller can only pass or fail these tests.

Ease of use score This is made up of various adjustments (safety harness, seat recline etc) (25%); loading and unloading the basket, using the swivel wheel lock, applying/releasing the brakes (25%); manoeuvring through doors, up/down stairs, turning a tight corner, over rough terrain (25%) and unfolding, folding and carrying (including fitting into a car boot) (25%).

Price Recommended retail, as of May 2012. **TABLE NOTES**

* Including supplied accessories, rounded to the nearest 0.1kg. ** Maximum dimensions when in use, rounded up to the next cm.

(A) Variable, which means there are no fixed notches. (B) Seat tilt positions. I Individual. L Linked.



Electric dreams

Nutshell

- Electric blankets often vary only in the features they offer – all on test are good or very good performers overall.
- We test 10 queen-sized electric blankets to destruction.

Electric blankets come in all shapes and sizes, but where performance is concerned most are cut from the same cloth, writes **Matthew Steen**

Snuggling into a warm bed is a great feeling for many during winter months, especially those of us in the colder areas of Australia. Unsurprisingly, a commonly requested test over the years has been electric blankets.

To test these, we simulate years of normal use with 2000 turns on our testing rig. We then make sure there are no visible breakages or wires protruding through the fabric. The blankets are also tested for moisture resistance, with more than 3000 volts being passed through them while wet. Thankfully, all pass these safety tests.

In this test, we also assess how well each blanket distributes heat using a thermal-imaging camera (see image, right). All distribute the heat

relatively evenly. We also found blankets that claim areas of higher heating, such as in the foot zones, back this up with more electric wiring running through these areas, giving greater heat coverage.

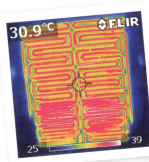
Play it safe

All blankets on test come with an overheat protection feature that stops the blanket from heating beyond certain temperatures. However, we strongly recommend you do a basic safety check of your electric blanket yearly before using it.

First, lay it flat on top of the bed and switch it on for five minutes.

Visually inspect and feel the wires – make sure they're operating correctly and are undamaged. You can also hire a testing service to come out to your home and test the blanket more

thoroughly, though at up to \$125 this can be twice the price of some blankets. For more safety information, see choice.com.au/eblanket. ■



Our thermal-imaging camera captures heat distribution

563,717

Electric blankets were sold in 2011

\$36.7m

The value of those blankets

<0.5%

Percentage of residential fires caused by electric blankets in 2010/11

COSTS				PERFORMANCE	
	Price (\$)	Running costs (\$)	Overall score (%)		
Sunbeam Quilted BL4755	199	4	89		
Sunbeam Fleecy BL4958	399	5	89		
Onkaparinga Klikk Traditional CEBKLIF	100	6	83		
Abode BA212	52	10	82		
Sunbeam BL3451	160	10	82		
Kambrook Snugasabug KEB533	130	5	81		
Lincraft EB152QBLIC	80	6	80		
Kambrook Snugasabug KEB332	70	7	79		
Jason CEBJAS1	100	6	76		
Onkaparinga Klikk Quilted CEBKLIG	230	5	75		

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of performance pre-heat setting until fully pre-heated, then turned down to the low level

WHAT TO BUY



89%

Sunbeam Quilted BL4755,
\$199

Good points

- Nine heating levels to choose from
- Timer
- Extra-warm foot zone
- Auto-off function
- Lowest running costs

Bad points

- None to mention

89%

Sunbeam Fleecy BL4958,
\$399

Good points

- Nine heating levels to choose from
- Timer
- Extra-warm foot zone
- Auto-off function

Bad points

- Heaviest on test

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Washable Check to see whether the controls are detachable – this means the blanket can be washed in your machine – or whether you'll have to hand-wash.

Fitting Models with the traditional ties that slide under the bed and are fixed on either side can be a pain to put on. The fitted sheet type is easier to use.

Zones Some blankets have a hot zone around the feet to make sure your feet are toasty warm when you get into bed.

Mattress protector If you don't have a mattress protector to go on top of the blanket, it may be worth buying a fleecy or quilted version.

Controls Most have at least three heat settings. Less basic models offer more heating levels, timed durations and luminous controls for visibility in a dark room. At the

inexpensive end of the market, look for one with raised markings so you can tell what setting you want in the dark.

For how we test and more, visit choice.com.au/eblanketreview

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FEATURES										SPECIFICATIONS						
Temperature at all night use (lowest) level (°C)	Time taken to reach peak temperature at maximum (preheat) level (min)	Maximum temperature achieved (°C)	Auto-off	Number of heating levels	On / off status light	Temperature level light display	Controller removable	Extra-warm foot zone	Machine-washable	Material	Timer settings (hrs)	Fitting method	Dimensions (cm, W x L)	Weight (kg)	Warranty (years)	Contact
25	3	44	✓	9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cotton / polyester	1, 3, 12	Fitted	148 x 198	2.8	3	sunbeam.com.au
26	4	48	✓	9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Wool / polyester	1, 3, 12	Fitted	153 x 197	4.7	3	sunbeam.com.au
29	5	38	✓	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Polyester	na	Fitted	152 x 196	1.6	3	www.sleepmaster.com.au
28	5	39		3	✓	✓	✓		✓	Polyester	na	Fitted	143 x 188	1.8	1	bigw.com.au
27	5	45	✓	9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Polyester	1.25, 12	Fitted	157 x 197	2.3	3	sunbeam.com.au
27	8	40		6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Polyester	na	Fitted	141 x 189	1.8	3	kambrook.com.au
28	5	40		3	✓					ns	na	Fitted	152 x 197	2.3	2	lincraft.com.au
29	8	39		3	✓		✓	✓	✓	Polyester	na	Tie-down	144 x 149	1.2	3	kambrook.com.au
28	12	36		3	✓	✓			✓	Polyester	na	Fitted	151 x 195	1.8	3	sleepmaster.com.au
27	12	38	✓	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cotton / polyester	na	Fitted	140 x 199	2.3	3	sleepmaster.com.au

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and ease of use (30%). **Features** See What to Look For, above. **Price** Recommended retail, as of April 2012. **Annual running costs** are based on eight hours per night, 92 days use in winter at the d on an electricity cost of 22c/kWh. **TABLE NOTES** na Not applicable. ns Not stated.



Nutshell

- CHOICE tests 20 electric convector, fan, panel and column heaters, 2000-2400W, including 14 newly tested models.
- The only fan model on test proves itself a very good but pricey heater.

Number one fan

Dyson's sleek fan heater takes the honours for its fast and even room heating, says **Chris Barnes**

Winter's here and it's time to dust off the heaters, if you haven't already. For heating large areas, consider reverse-cycle air conditioning (see *CHOICE*, May 2012) or gas heating (*CHOICE*, April 2012), but for a small space, a portable electric heater is a good option.

Heaters with fans can warm up a room quickly and evenly. However, fans can be noisy. The recommended Dyson bladeless fan heater (opposite) is the noisiest on test, measuring about 16dB above background noise at full power. If you want quiet heating – for a bedroom, for example – consider a model that heats without the fan on (such as the DeLonghi HCS2552FTS) or has no fan at all (the Dimplex Comet, Noirot 7358-8T and Atlantic Rio).

As well as being fast to heat a room, a heater should have an accurate

thermostat that cycles the heater on and off at the right times to keep the room warm. Our heating score takes this into account; all the models already mentioned have good thermostats.

Safety matters

We check heaters for electrical safety, including how well their tilt switch works. We also drape a towel over the heater to check it detects the potential overheating situation and shuts off before damage is done. The Omega Altise failed this test. The DeLonghi Dragon 3 passed, but took a long time to switch itself off and had slight damage to its plastic. Keep the heater away from furniture and fabrics, and dry clothes on a rack nearby rather than on the heater.

The Dimplex Comet and Noirot 7358-8T narrowly failed an electrical safety test. Both manufacturers said these models are certified for electrical safety, so we assume these were one-off failures. ■

For more details, including how we test heaters and the full results table, log on to choice.com.au/electricheaters

	Price (\$)	Overall score (%)	PERFORMAN
# Dyson Hot + Cool AM04	549	80	
DeLonghi HCS2552FTS	149	70	
# Dimplex Comet 2NC3-242-LT (A)	299	68	
DeLonghi DL2401TF	169	66	
# Hotpoint HPC200TF (B)	89	65	
# Noirot 7358-8T	539	65	
# Atlantic Rio 521824	341	64	
DeLonghi RAP2401T	379	60	
# Sunbeam HE4100	129	60	
DeLonghi HS25F	59	59	
Atlantic Artisan 519622	395	58	
# Atlantic Artisan 519627	427	57	
Dimplex OFC2400TIF	150	57	
# Dimplex OFRC24TIB	180	57	
# Everdure HPE221W	179	56	
# DeLonghi Dragon 3 TRD2400T	299	55	
# DeLonghi HCM2030	39	55	
Kambrook KOH111	100	52	
# Nobo E4E20	561	52	
Dimplex OFC2000T1 (A)	130	48	
# Noirot 7358-7T	539	48	
# Omega Altise OMC24E1	200	48	

WHAT TO BUY

80%

Dyson Hot + Cool AM04

Good points

- Very good at heating
- Thermostat can be set to target temperature up to 37°C
- Variable fan speed and oscillation control
- Can be used for cooling as well as heating
- Bladeless fan
- Remote control

Bad points

- Comparatively expensive and noisy
- No cord storage



\$549

70%

DeLonghi HCS2552FTS*

Good points

- Good at heating
- Wall-mount kit supplied
- Can heat without fan on for quieter operation

Bad points

- No cord storage



\$149

Best Buy

ABOUT THE REST

The Dimplex Comet, Noirot 7358-8T and Atlantic Rio 521824

models all have good heating performance, but don't rate well for ease of use due to basic controls, poor mobility and/or no cord storage.

The remaining models have only OK heating performance at best. **The Kambrook, Dimplex OFC2000TI, Noirot 7358-7T and Omega Altise** have the lowest heating performances, mainly due to slow heat-up or to erratic thermostats.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Thermostat Some heaters have a simple range of heat settings (for example, low/medium/high), while others have a sliding scale or allow you to set a target temperature for the room.

Fan allows for much quicker and more even heat distribution, but may also be noisy.

Frost-watch may be useful for colder climates as it claims to maintain a temperature of about 5°C if the thermostat is left on its lowest setting, avoiding frost. We don't test this feature.

Thermal cut-out is designed to stop the heater from overheating.

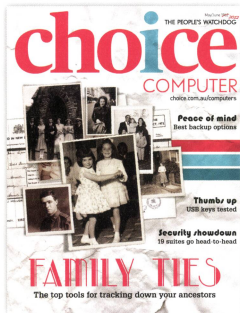
Tilt switch turns the heater off when it falls over.

Cord length should be long enough for your needs. Electric heaters should not be used with an extension cord, as it may become hot and pose a fire hazard.



USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of heating (70%) and ease of use (30%). **Heater type** FH Fan heater; Co Convactor; PC Panel convactor; OC Oil column. **OFC** Oil-free column. **TABLE NOTES** # Newly tested model. **ns** Not stated. **na** Not applicable – no fan. **(A)** Discontinued, but may still be found in some stores. **(B)** Hotpoint has recently gone into voluntary administration. We've included results for the recently tested HPC200TF convactor model, but ongoing availability of this and other Hotpoint models is uncertain. At the time of writing, there was no news about company status on the Hotpoint website. **(C)** Variable thermostat setting.

	FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS									
Power consumption over 120 mins (kWh)	Passed safety tests	Frost watch	Timer	Thermal cut-out	Tilt switch	Cord storage	Heat without fan on	Heater type	Heat settings	Claimed maximum heating power (W)	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Weight (kg)	Cord length (m)	Contact	
0.0	✓			✓	✓			FH	(C)	2000	58 x 14 x 15	2.4	1.8	dyson.com.au	
0.4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Co	3	2000	46 x 76 x 15	5.6	2.3	delonghi.com.au	
0.4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		na	PC	(C)	2400	54 x 101 x 9	7.1	1.3	dimplex.com.au	
0.5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	OC	3	2400	64 x 53 x 15	16.1	2.2	delonghi.com.au	
0.7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Co	3	2000	37 x 59 x 10	3.4	1.5	hotpoint.com.au	
0.1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		na	PC	(C)	2400	44 x 90 x 10	7.0	1.8	noirot.com.au	
0.3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		na	PC	(C)	2400	54 x 89 x 8	7.3	1.4	atlantics.com.au	
0.4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		OC	4	2400	65 x 66 x 18	21.2	2.2	delonghi.com.au	
0.5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	na	Co	3	2000	64 x 79 x 9	7.8	2.7	sunbeam.com.au	
0.5	✓	✓	ns				✓	Co	3	2000	43 x 62 x 11	4.0	2.2	delonghi.com.au	
0.0	✓	✓	✓	ns			na	PC	(C)	2000	46 x 74 x 10	6.4	1.4	atlantics.com.au	
0.2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		na	PC	(C)	2400	45 x 89 x 7	7.4	1.4	atlantics.com.au	
0.0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	OC	2	2400	63 x 53 x 15	13.9	1.4	dimplex.com.au	
0.2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	OFC	2	2400	63 x 54 x 14	10.8	2.1	dimplex.com.au	
0.3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	na	OC	(C)	2200	44 x 94 x 7	7.0	1.5	everdure.com	
0.2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	na	OC	3	2400	64 x 57 x 16	19.2	2.1	delonghi.com.au	
0.3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		na	Co	3	2000	40 x 53 x 10	2.8	2.3	delonghi.com.au	
2.7	✓	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	na	OC	3	2400	63 x 53 x 14	13.3	1.8	kambrook.com.au	
3.6	✓			✓			na	PC	(C)	2000	40 x 112 x 5	7.6	1.7	nobo.com.au	
2.3	✓	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	na	OC	2	2000	63 x 45 x 15	11.8	1.3	dimplex.com.au	
3.5	✓	ns	✓	✓	ns		na	PC	(C)	2000	44 x 74 x 10	6.5	1.8	noirot.com.au	
4.3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	na	Co	3	2400	65 x 59 x 13	7.5	1.7	omegalitise.com.au	



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Index

A woman with dark hair, wearing a dark top, is sitting at a desk. She is smiling at the camera. On the desk in front of her is a computer monitor displaying a blue screen with a white icon. To the left of the monitor is a black telephone. The background shows a window with horizontal blinds and some office supplies on a shelf.

CHOICE.COM.AU JUNE 2012 /// 75

Hard Word

Home comforts

Let's face it: who doesn't need a freshly roasted tea towel or three?



Macro meats, micro ingredients?

We tried and tried, but couldn't find any bush plum in the ingredients list.



INGREDIENTS:

Kangaroo Meat (92%), Sugar, Salt, Mineral Salt (500), Malto-dextrin, Dehydrated Vegetable, Vegetables Gums (412, 415), Food Acids (262, 331), Flavour Enhancer (635), Colour (150d), 122) Modified Tapioca Starch (1440), Spices, Natural Identical Flavouring, Natural Smoke Flavouring, Natural Colour (1460), Antioxidants (316), Vegetable Oil, Emulsifier (472c), Water. See back of label for easy to follow cooking instructions.

PRICE/kg	NET WT/kg	EST. SAVINGS	TOTAL PRICE
16.65	0.354	09.08.11	6.06

1. Hoodie \$20 Save \$9

2. Top \$27 Save \$12

3. Jumper \$27 Save \$12

4. Tracksuits \$14 Save \$6

5. Tracksuits \$14 Save \$6

Target. Fabulous fleece!

- A. Boys' Piping Hot
Fleece hoodie: 7-16.
Fleece trackpants: 7-16.
Save \$6 Now \$14
- B. Women's
Fleece top: 10-18.
Straight leg
Fleece pants: 10-18.
Save \$9 Now \$20
- C. Men's
Fleece jumper: S-XXL.
Tracksuits: XS-XXL.
Save \$6 Now \$13
- D. Girls' Top: 7-16.
Tracksuits: 7-16.
Save \$10 Now \$10

Barmy army

Several readers sent us this Target ad, which we thought had a little something extra.



SALT OF THE EARTH

Himalayan pink rock salt - from those little-known Australian Himalayas.

Packed in Australia from local and imported ingredients



Shear madness

For those who live for their pruning?

Thanks this month go to Ruby Curtis, Julie Mangos, Andrew Athavie, Ted Whitmore, J Godden, Paul Baker and Helen Clarke. If you have any examples you'd like to share with other CHOICE members, send them with your full name to The Hard Word, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Please don't email us your entries - we need the unmarked originals.